Presidential, Parliamentary, Semi-Presidential Systems
General Outline

- Frameworks of Presidential and Parliamentary systems
- Government Case Studies in Development Countries
- Review of Academic Debate
What are they?

- Presidential government
- Parliamentary government
- Semi-Presidential government
Presidential System

- In a *presidential system*, the President is the big guy.
  - The President, who is the chief executive as well as the symbolic head of government, is chosen by a separate election from that of the legislature.
  - The President then appoints his or her cabinet of ministers (or "secretaries" in US parlance).
- Ministers/Secretaries usually are not simultaneously members of the legislature, although their appointment may require the advice and consent of the legislative branch.
  - Because the senior officials of the executive branch are separately elected or appointed, the presidential political system is characterized by a separation of powers, wherein the executive and legislative branches are independent of one another.
Presidential system

- Presidents have great control over their cabinet appointees who serve at the President’s pleasure, and who are usually selected for reasons other than the extent of their congressional support (as in parliamentary systems).

- The U.S. represents the strongest form of presidentialism, in the sense that the powers of the executive and legislative branches are separate, and legislatures (national and state) often have significant powers.
Parliamentary system

- **Parliamentary** systems, unlike presidential systems, are typified by a fusion of powers between the legislative and executive branches.

- The Prime Minister is the chief executive
  - The Prime Minister may be elected to the legislature in the same way that all other members are elected.
  - The Prime Minister is the leader of the party that wins the majority of votes to the legislature (either de facto, or in some cases through an election held by the legislature).
  - The Prime Minister appoints Cabinet Ministers.
Parliamentary system

• However, unlike in the presidential systems, these members are typically themselves legislative members from the ruling party or ruling coalition.
• Thus, in a parliamentary system, the constituency of the executive and legislature are the same.
• If the ruling party is voted out of the legislature, the executive also changes.
• Continued cooperation between the executive and legislature is required for the government to survive and to be effective in carrying out its programs.
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The term *hybrid* generally refers to a system with a separately elected President who shares executive power with the Prime Minister.

- The President usually has the constitutional power to select the Prime Minister.
- If the constitution and/or political circumstances tend to place the emphasis on the powers of the President, it is sometimes termed a *semi-presidential* system.
- If, on the other hand, the Prime Minister and the legislative leaders enjoy more power than the President does, it may be referred to as a *semi-parliamentary* system.
Semi-Presidential (hybrid) Systems

- For political reasons, Presidents generally appoint leaders of the ruling coalition to the post of Prime Minister, although they are not required to do so constitutionally.

- The Prime Minister may or may not be a member of the President’s political party, depending upon what party or coalition of parties maintains the majority in the legislature.
Semi-Presidential System

- The French system is the hybrid model most often cited as a semi-presidential system.
- In the French system, the President has broad powers.
  - For example, the President nominates the Prime Minister and selects his own cabinet, over which he presides. The President, his cabinet and attending bureaucracy initiate and draft most legislation.
- The French President, like some others in hybrid systems, has some areas where his power is well defined, such as in the conduct of foreign affairs.
- The day to day running of the government is, however, left to the Prime Minister and Cabinet.
Defining Difference: Removal of Office

- A key difference between presidential and parliamentary systems lies in the power to remove a chief executive or to dissolve the legislature.
- In parliamentary systems, the chief executive’s term of office is directly linked with that of the legislature, while in presidential systems the terms are not linked.
Differences: Removal of Office

- Separation of powers: in a *presidential system* presidents and members of the legislature are separately elected for a given length of time.
  - Presidents have no authority to remove members of the legislature.
  - Premature removal of either legislative members or the President can only be initiated by a vote in the lower legislative chamber and under particular conditions.
  - Thus, under normal circumstances, even if the political party that the President represents becomes a minority in either or both houses of the legislature, the President will remain in his position for the full term for which he was elected.

*We keep this in check also! Limit the terms!*
More Differences: Removal of Office

- In a *parliamentary system*, the Prime Minister can be removed from office in two ways.
  - The first is through a ‘no-confidence’ motion, which is typically filed by the opposition or a coalition of opposition parties.
    - The no confidence motion calls for a vote in the legislature to demonstrate that the legislature no longer has confidence in the Prime Minister and his cabinet of Ministers.
    - If the vote passes by a majority, the Executive, including the Prime Minister, is forced to step down. Since the Prime Minister and his cabinet of ministers are members of the legislature, this brings about new legislative elections. The term of the Prime Minister, therefore, is generally linked to that of the rest of the legislature.
Even More Differences: Removal of Office

- However, the Prime Minister can be removed by his/her own party members, in a setting outside of the legislature.
  - For example, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was removed by party vote and replaced by John Major during the Conservative Party caucus.
  - Such a removal, whereby the party decides to change its leader, does not force legislative elections.
Important factors:

party discipline

• What is it?
  • Party discipline, simply defined, refers to the practice of legislators voting with their parties.
  • Typically stronger in parliamentary systems than in presidential
    • the "executive" government requires majority party cohesiveness for its own survival.

• In countries that are transitioning to a two or multiparty system party discipline may be generally weak owing to the fact that parties may be newer, lack a strong internal structure and constituent base and/or lack experience in operating in a multiparty legislature.
The following are common attributes mentioned by supporters of the two systems based on party discipline:

Advantages of weaker party discipline in presidential systems:

- Relations between individual members and constituents tend to be stronger.
- The President and individual members are directly accountable to the voters.
- In deeply divided societies, some theorists argue that the parliamentary system can lead to one party controlling the state and locking other ethnic or regional groups out of power.
Advantages of stronger party discipline in parliamentary systems:

- Parties and stable party coalitions within parliament can be held accountable to the public based on their promotion of the party platform.
- The chief executive can be made accountable to her/his party and the parliament as a whole by a vote of no confidence at any time.
- Highly organized parties can act as a link between party leaders and constituents at local levels.
Last Comparison: Legislation

who formulates, initiates, and amends it?

- In parliamentary, presidential and hybrid systems, the legislature is a forum for discussion of political, economic and social issues and is required to legitimize new laws.
- One of the major differences of these systems lies in the legislature’s power (or lack thereof) to formulate and initiate legislation.
Legislation and three systems

- **Presidential**
  - Power to veto
  - Executive can draft legislation but a member must introduce it

- **Parliamentary**
  - The chief executive and his/her cabinet initiate any piece of legislation affecting the budget or revenue.
  - In the UK and other similar models, legislatures can only amend legislation on narrow, technical terms.

- **Semi-Presidential**
  - Bills can be introduced by the individual members, the executive and the government (the Prime Minister and the cabinet).
  - However, the introduction of executive initiated bills takes precedence over member bills.
  - The President can by-pass the legislature by taking a proposed bill directly to the public through a national referendum.
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<th>Who makes up the Executive Branch?</th>
<th>Presidential</th>
<th>Parliamentary</th>
<th>Semi-Presidential (France)</th>
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<td>Separately Elected <strong>President</strong>, <strong>Cabinet</strong> nominated by the President and confirmed by the legislature. (Cabinet members cannot simultaneously be members of legislature, and vice-versa)</td>
<td><strong>Prime Minister</strong>: PM and <strong>Cabinet</strong> elected by the majority party in the legislature. The Cabinet, or Ministers, are members of the legislature. A <strong>Hereditary Monarch</strong> is head of state (mostly ceremonial).</td>
<td>Separately elected <strong>President</strong> with strong powers chooses a <strong>Cabinet</strong> and <strong>Prime Minister</strong> who presides over the legislature. (The President presides over the Cabinet, who cannot be members of the legislature.)</td>
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| Can the legislature remove the executive, and vice-versa? | Legislature cannot remove the President, except under extreme conditions, and the president cannot dissolve the legislature. | The legislature dissolves the chief executive and cabinet through a vote of no confidence, forcing new parliamentary elections. | The legislature cannot remove the President, but can dissolve parliament, removing the Prime Minister and cabinet. The President can dissolve the lower house. |

| Bodies involved in the legislative process? | Upper House: Senate Lower House: House Govt. cabinet departments assist in drafting bills, but most originate via committees in legislature; President can veto legislation, which can be overridden by 2/3 vote of both houses. | Upper: House of Lords Lower: House of Commons The government (Prime Minister, cabinet and bureaucracy) Occasionally bills referred to select committees for consultation. | Upper: Senate Lower: National Assembly President; Prime Minister and cabinet appointed by PM who sits in the legislature (can be MPs). |

| Who Initiates Legislation? | Both Houses Executive can draft legislation but a member must introduce it. | Executive and Both Houses, but MPs can’t introduce bills that affect govt. spending or taxation. Can only amend on technical grounds. Executive-initiated bills take precedence over member bills. | Executive and both Houses, Appointed bodies, such as the Economic and Social commission make recommendations on drafting legislation. MPs cannot introduce any bill that raises or reduces expenditures. Executive-initiated bills take precedence over member bills. |