

# Systems of Government, party systems and their elements

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## *System of Government*

A system of government ("government system", "Regierungssystem") is constituted by the political institutions that are directly or indirectly relevant for political decision making *and* the interactions between those institutions. In a more narrow sense, the government system is that part of the political system which generates decisions that are binding for the rest of society.

## *Parliamentary System*

In parliamentary systems, the only democratically legitimated institution is the parliament. The government deriving its authority from the confidence of the parliament, either from parliamentary majorities or parliamentary tolerance of minority governments, and only for the time that the legislature is willing to support it between elections and, exceptionally, as long as the parliament is not able to produce an alternative government. Parliamentary systems can take various forms with regard to the relationship of parliament and government, with regard to the character of political decision-making, and with regard to general stability.

## *Presidential System*

An executive with considerable powers in the constitution and generally with full control of the composition of his cabinet and the administration is elected by the people (directly or by electoral college) for a fixed period of time and is not dependent on a formal vote of confidence by the democratically elected representatives in parliament; the president is not only the holder of executive power but the symbolic head of the state and cannot be dismissed between elections, except in rare cases of impeachments.

→ "dual democratic legitimacy"; checks and balances.

→ fixed electoral terms; rigidity".

**Table 1: Parliamentarism and Presidentialism compared (Linz 1994)**

	Presidential System	Parliamentary System
Character of democratic legitimation	Dual	Single
Term of office	Rigid	Flexible
Accountability	Low (no re-election)	High (re-election)
Identifiability	High (personalization)	Depends on personalization of political culture
Power Distribution	Winner Takes All	Coalition Government allows for better representation
Character of electoral game	Zero-Sum	Positive Sum
Political style	Delegative Polarizing Symbolic (Head of State)	Responsive Accommodating Issue-oriented
Political socialization of President	Potentially an Outsider	Compatible with other political forces (parties)
Character of rule	Stability under certain circumstances	Instability under certain circumstances
Succession	Vice-President (sometimes)	Within power distribution among parties or new election
Compatibility with party system types	Only with small number, non-polarized and structured party systems	With most party system types
Type of leadership	Personalized	Personalized and/or party oriented
Compatibility with segmented societies and/or federal states	President can serve as symbol of unity of state	Options of power sharing by coalition building
Position of military (as grantor/defender of state)	Danger of deligitimization of a person	Danger of deligitimization of a parliamentary body

### ***Semi-Presidential System***

Semi-Presidential systems combine two features: (1) The President and Head of State is elected directly by the people, (2) the Prime Minister is dependent on being elected and dismissed by parliament. In Europe, the semi-presidential system has evolved *historically* from parliamentarism (Weimar Republic, Fifth French Republic). *Functionally*, the system has more features in common with presidentialism.

### ***Party System***

The sum of party organizations, party-related institutions and their interactions in a political system. Party systems bear two main dimensions: (1) party programs: ideologies in societies and of parties as well as their interrelations, (2) number of parties: the crystallization of programs within the political space given by a political system.

### ***Polarization***

The degree to which programmatic and/or ideological positions differ from each other within a party system. Polarization bears two dimensions: ideological distance and intensity of political conflict.

### ***Fragmentation***

The degree to which political programs are distributed among different political parties. There are various ways of classification: number of parties, two-party versus multi-party systems, relationship and character of big and/or small parties, action versus blocking ("blackmail") potential.

**Table 2: Hypotheses on the influence of institutional parameters on democracy**

	Democracy with regard to specific qualities**		
	Stability of Regime*	Participation / Inclusion	Competition / Accountability
Parliamentary System			
Presidential System			
Semi-Presidential System			
Polarized Party System			
Fragmentized Party System			

\* not: Stability of Government(s).

\*\* Legend: "+" = predominantly positive influence

"-" = predominantly negative influence

"O" = no dominant influence or both positive and negative elements of influence

### ***Relevant and/or cited literature***

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