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Rethinking the ‘presidentialism debate’: conceptualizing coalitional politics in cross-regional perspective

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The democratization literature has increased our understanding of the role of institutional variables in the study of democratic sustainability. Debates about the dangers of presidentialism have been central to this body of research. In more recent times the presidentialism literature has focused on the capacity of presidents to overcome the conflict-inducing nature of the separation of powers through successful coalition formation. This review article moves this research agenda forward by examining how presidents build legislative coalitions in different regional contexts. Based on the extant analysis of presidential systems in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa and the former Soviet Union, the article develops the idea that presidents use a toolbox of five key tools when constructing legislative coalitions: agenda power, budgetary authority, cabinet management, partisan powers, and informal institutions. We find that presidents typically utilize more than one tool when they act; that the combinations of tools they employ affects the usage and strength of other parts of the presidential toolkit; and that the choice of tools can create negative consequences for the wider political system. Our findings reveal the limitations of the univariate bias of much of the early presidentialism literature and the need for greater cross-regional research into the effects of presidential rule.

Keywords: presidentialism; legislatures; coalitions; Africa; Latin America; former Soviet Union

Introduction

Over the past 20 years research on political democratization has been closely linked to the literature on institutional design. Nowhere is this symbiosis more evident than in the long-running debate on the merits of competing executive formats: presidentialism, parliamentarism, and semi-presidentialism. Political scientists and political practitioners have argued in favour of one or the other formula, deploying both theoretical and empirical arguments in their efforts to defend a particular institutional choice. In this review article we survey the state

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of the art, documenting areas of consensus and controversy while delineating important topics for future research. We argue that although what we call the ‘presidentialism debate’ has increased our understanding of the role of institutional variables in the study of democratic sustainability, the existing literature suffers from four key deficiencies. The debate has too often been univariate (looking at one institutional variable to the exclusion of others); it has too frequently been divorced from local context (ignoring national histories, cultures, and trajectories); it has unwisely ignored the role of informal institutions; and it has often tried to stake grand comparative generalizations on the experience of a single world region.

Our main aim is to identify and correct some of these biases while presenting a new framework through which to analyse a phenomenon largely unanticipated in the early years of this debate: the surprising sustainability of multiparty presidentialism in new democracies. Following recent trends in the literature,¹ we accept that the survival of this regime format is owed largely to successful coalition formation by executives in multiparty legislatures. However, we push the debate forward by examining *how* presidents cultivate multiparty alliances. We also widen the analytical lens by drawing on evidence from new presidential systems located in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the former Soviet Union.

To date, the literature on legislative-executive relations under multiparty presidentialism has typically focused on the ability of presidents to use one or two distinctive strategies to manage fragmented assemblies.² A cross-regional focus enables us to build on this extant work in several important ways. First, by comparing experiences across the three regions, we demonstrate that despite strong cross-regional variations in political landscapes, elected presidents tend to draw on five key governing tools: agenda power, budgetary authority, cabinet management, partisan powers, and informal institutions. Following Raile, Pereira, and Power, we term this the ‘executive toolbox’.³ Second, we argue that it is only by considering the ability of presidents to master the toolbox as a whole that one can account for the success of presidents in managing interparty alliances. Third, we show that there are clear regional variations in the various admixtures of these tools. In Latin America, the distribution of cabinet posts and particularistic benefits or pork to supporters (through budgetary authority) has helped to augment and fine-tune the already considerable agenda powers enjoyed by executives. In the former Soviet Union, presidents have also enjoyed far reaching agenda powers, but they have come to make far greater use of partisan powers over time. In Africa, cabinet management has been more important than has commonly been recognized, but it is informal strategies such as the development of patron–client relations that have underpinned the capacity of incumbents to control legislative processes. Fourth, we demonstrate that there are also some commonalities between our regions; the use of the toolbox is neither random nor predetermined. For instance, as the distribution of cabinet seats, patronage, and pork comes at a considerable cost, presidents prefer to rely on their control over party and agenda-setting powers to advance their legislative agenda where possible. Thus, despite variation across space and time, we can begin to identify an interesting

inverse relationship between two clusters of tools: as the value of partisan and agenda-setting powers declines, presidents increasingly resort to portfolio allocation, budgetary authority, and informal institutions.

This article proceeds in four sections. In the first section, we discuss how the presidentialism debate has evolved from concern with democratic breakdown to a focus on coalitional governance. In the second section, we discuss our theoretical framework and develop the notion of the executive toolbox. Our third section draws together some lessons from recent research on executive-legislative relations in Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union. The fourth section discusses the value of cross-regional analysis for further research on presidentialism.

From the ‘perils of presidentialism’ to the coalitional approach

Coalitional presidentialism is a strategic response to the institutional dilemmas posed by the coexistence of a presidential executive with a fragmented multiparty legislature. In order to win support for the legislative agenda of the executive, presidents must behave much like prime ministers in the multiparty democracies of Western Europe: they must first assemble and then cultivate interparty coalitions on the floor of the assembly. The objective of the president is to foster the emergence of a legislative cartel which will reliably defend the preferences of the executive branch.

The idea that directly elected presidents could serve as coalitional formateurs was not well anticipated by scholars of democratization in the 1980s and 1990s, many of whom expected that multiparty presidential regimes were doomed to collapse.⁴ Yet, today, there is a growing consensus that ‘presidentialism can work like parliamentarism’.⁵ This is not to say that presidents use the same methods as prime ministers, or that they enjoy all of the legislative powers that prime ministers do. Rather, scholarship on a wide range of cases has clearly demonstrated that although presidents have less direct mechanisms through which to influence legislative developments, they are just as capable of constructing effective and stable coalitions as their counterparts in parliamentary regimes.

How was it, then, that scholars shifted their emphases from the ‘perils of presidentialism’ to recognition of coalitional practices over the past 20 years? Modifying Elgie’s useful periodization,⁶ we can divide the ‘presidentialism debate’ into three phases. The first phase was dominated by Linz’s classic argument for the superiority of parliamentarism over presidentialism, especially for young, untested democracies. Linz claimed that the competing democratic legitimacies under presidentialism (the president and legislature being elected separately) would lead to recurrent conflicts.⁷ Conflicts would be exacerbated by the winner-take-all nature of presidential elections, the two-dimensional nature of the presidential office (the president represents both the state and a partisan option), and the overall inflexibility of the system (long, fixed executive terms). In the second phase of the debate, Mainwaring argued that the problem was not presidentialism per se, but rather the ‘difficult combination’ of presidentialism with fragmented multiparty

systems.⁸ In a third phase, the ‘difficult combination’ argument was assailed by scholars claiming that presidentialism could work like parliamentarism: presidents were capable of building stable multiparty coalitions, even in weakly institutionalized party systems.⁹ In one of the most remarkable recent examples of South–North knowledge transfer in comparative politics, the core of this argument was rolled out mostly by young Latin American scholars completing doctoral dissertations in US and European universities between 1997 and 2007.¹⁰

That this literature argued that presidents can manage coalitions as successfully as prime ministers should not be taken to imply that it assumed that they operate in exactly the same way. Samuels and Shugart’s recent work, for instance, shows that executives have fundamentally different authority relationships with their own parties in presidential and parliamentary regimes.¹¹ More specifically, they suggest that whereas in parliamentary systems a ruling party ‘fuses its executive and legislative functions’¹² because the party leader is chosen and held accountable through internal selection and deselection procedures, in presidential systems parties delegate greater discretion to their leaders because presidents are elected independently of the legislature. Thus, Samuels and Shugart find that ‘presidentialization is at odds with the core logic of parliamentarism’.¹³ But they argue that it is precisely this difference that empowers presidents, because the greater discretion they enjoy makes it harder for their parties to hold them to account, which in turn ‘affords the party leader additional discretion in selecting cabinet and other executive personnel’.¹⁴ Consequently, presidents face fewer constraints than prime ministers when dealing with their own parties over the design of cabinets and the construction of interparty coalitions. Presidents may achieve the same coalitional goals as prime ministers, then, but not always by the same means.

Although coalitional presidentialism has received the most attention in the Latin American literature, scholars of Africa independently came to similar conclusions about their region. Chabal and Daloz¹⁵ and Van de Walle¹⁶ found that African presidents’ flexible use of formal and informal powers enabled them to dominate even highly fragmented legislatures. Similarly, research on post-Soviet parliaments, in particular the Russian State Duma and Ukrainian Rada, has begun to focus on the range of tools used by presidents to build parliamentary majorities.¹⁷ Cross-national quantitative research has supplied additional support for the ideas that coalition formation is common under presidentialism and that multipartyism does not significantly reduce either the legislative success rates of directly elected executives or the likelihood of democratic consolidation.¹⁸ To summarize, there is an emerging consensus that many presidents enjoy tools of government which allow them to overcome the disincentives to cooperation deriving from multipartyism.

With coalitional governance now widely recognized as the ‘solution’ to the dilemmas posed by Linz and Mainwaring, the presidentialism debate has reached a plateau and runs the risk of stagnating. To move forward, researchers should be far more precise about what exactly empowers presidents to manage unwieldy coalitions – in other words, about what resources are found inside the

'presidential toolbox' in different cases. Scholars should ask whether these governing tools work in similar ways across different regions and national contexts.

Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework emerges from an institutionalist approach to executive-legislative relations. We assume that conflict and cooperation between the president and assembly are conditioned by fundamental questions of institutional design. Institutions do not merely shape the strategies of actors: they also affect the probability distribution of certain political outcomes.¹⁹ Several well-established institutionalist axioms undergird our approach here. For example, other things being equal, the greater the number of political parties, the more difficult it is to form a stable coalition in the legislature;²⁰ the more difficult it is to form stable coalitions, the less likely the assembly will approve legislation proposed by the executive;²¹ the persistence of legislative gridlock is more threatening to young, fragile democracies than to established democratic regimes;²² and so on. Axioms such as these shaped the early and pessimistic views about multiparty presidentialism.

Our approach moves beyond previous institutionalist work in four main ways. First, rather than assume that a single institutional resource permits presidents to elicit multiparty support, whether it be agenda power,²³ management of cabinet portfolios,²⁴ or budgetary authority or 'pork',²⁵ we assume that presidents have access to a *plurality* of tools which can be used to incentivize coalition formation and legislative support – the 'presidential toolbox'.²⁶ Given the extraordinary diversity among presidential²⁷ and semi-presidential²⁸ systems around the world, our preliminary identification of five broad clusters of tools should not be taken as an exhaustive typology. Other strategies of coalition management exist and the particular combination of tools deployed by presidents will vary across political systems. Below we proceed inductively and make no *a priori* claim that any one presidential tool is more important than the others, either within systems or across systems; however, we do suggest that generalizations like these are both possible and desirable in the next wave of presidential research.

Second, we recognize the importance of informal institutions in presidential governance.²⁹ For example, the historical consolidation of American presidentialism is often linked to paraconstitutional practices such as the Congressional committee system or to informal institutions such as the spoils system.³⁰ Informal mechanisms of executive-legislative exchange are important to emerging democracies as well. In Latin America, clientelism and side payments to legislators are well-known tools of governance; in the post-Soviet regimes, the executive's power to regulate the transition to a market economy created space for the cultivation of particularistic networks;³¹ in Africa, ethnic and regional loyalties overlay and often overcome partisan and institutional interests.³²

Third, we hold that theory building needs to come to terms with certain contextual variables which mediate the explanatory power of political institutions. Executive-legislative relations do not occur in a vacuum. Presidential strategies of

coalition management will vary from case to case, depending on the electoral system, on the degree of party discipline, on the ideological proximity of the available coalition partners, on whether the country is federal or unitary, etc. Even when presidential tools are held constant, the ability of executives to deploy them effectively is still contingent on context. As Neustadt demonstrated for the United States,³³ presidential power derives from the president's standing with the public (popularity) and from his reputation within the political class (professional prestige). Other contextual variables which impact the executive-legislative relationship are time (the electoral calendar, for example, 'honeymoon' and 'lame duck' effects, routinely shapes the assembly's propensity to cooperate with the executive), economic performance, the quality of presidential leadership, the relevance of actors exogenous to the executive-legislative relationship (for example, presidential aspirants, powerful governors, anti-system forces), and of course national history and culture.³⁴ Some frequently studied institutional variables (for example, presidential prerogatives, party and factional organization in legislatures) may in fact have radically different impacts and meanings across various systems.

Fourth and finally, theory must be built on and tested in diverse settings. Extant theory on coalitional presidentialism has primarily been derived from the experience of a single case or region, typically Latin America. Although there is a growing body of scholarship that seeks to test presidential hypotheses against more global datasets,³⁵ research on the micro-dynamics of coalition formation still tends to be region specific. In part this is due to historical reasons: although coalitional presidentialism existed in Latin America during the Second Wave of democratization,³⁶ it is only since the early 1990s – when the Third Wave of democratization extended to sub-Saharan Africa and Eastern Europe – that we have a significant number of comparable cases in more than one world region. As the selection of cases in Table 1 shows, the necessity of constructing interparty coalitions is a reality for presidents in all three regions.

The nine cases summarized in Table 1 provide a useful basis for cross-regional comparison. First, they all include presidents who were forced to construct legislative coalitions from several parties, factions, or caucuses. This was either because presidents failed to win a single party majority at a parliamentary election, or because they were unable to construct a stable one-party majority over the lifetime of a parliament. Second, each case meets the threshold of 'partially democratic' (above 1 on a -10 to 10 scale) in the well-known Polity IV dataset³⁷ or 'partly free' (above 5 on a 1–7 scale, averaging political rights and civil liberties) in the Freedom House ranking of political systems.³⁸ Although the cases in Table 1 are not equally democratic or free in both the Polity and Freedom House rankings, they have operated with a baseline of multiparty politics in which legislators have been able to go about their business within a relatively open political environment. Finally, these cases are all examples of political systems in which the executive is formally accountable to the president. Cases of premier-presidential rule, where the prime minister and cabinet are exclusively accountable to the parliament are not included. This issue is of particular relevance in the former Soviet Union where

Table 1. Illustrating the necessity of multiparty coalitions in Latin America, the former Soviet Union and Africa.

Region/country	Effective number of parties in Lower House	Lower House seats held by president's party (%)	Index of coalitional necessity
<i>Latin America</i>			
Brazil (2002)	7.81	18	64.04
Ecuador (2002)	6.71	25	50.33
Chile (2001)	5.08	8 ^a	46.73
<i>Former Soviet Union</i>			
Armenia (2003)	5.27	25 ^b	39.52
Russia (1999)	4.51	16 ^c	37.88
Ukraine (2010)	3.30	40 ^d	19.80
<i>Africa</i>			
Kenya (2002)	3.48	27 ^e	25.42
Benin (2006)	3.89	42 ^f	22.56
Malawi (2004)	3.11	41 ^g	18.35

Source: These data were compiled from Jones, 'Beyond the Electoral Connection' for Latin America; *African Elections Database* for Africa; and Inter-Parliamentary Union, *PARLINE Database on National Parliaments* for Africa and the former Soviet Union.

Notes: Index of Coalitional Necessity is obtained by multiplying the effective number of parties by the inverse of the percentage of seats held by the president's own party, then dividing by 10 for ease of interpretation. ^aFor Chile, if the two longstanding alliances (Concertación and Alianza) were considered as de facto parties, the figures in the table would be 2.02, 55, and 9.09 respectively. However, parties and interparty coalitions are conceptually distinct, and should not be conflated even when they are identically reproduced over time; ^bAlthough the president was officially independent, several parties pledged their support for him during the election campaign. This figure represents the proportion of seats taken by the largest pro-presidential party: the Republican Party; ^cThis was before the Kremlin established a slender majority in the spring of 2001 with an alliance of the Unity, Fatherland-All Russia, People's Deputy, and Russia's Regions parliamentary party groups; ^dThis was the approximate seat share of the president's party when the constitution reverted to the president-parliamentary regime type in 2010; ^eFollowing the break-up of the National Rainbow Coalition (NaRC). Thus, the components of NaRC are treated as separate parties. This figure represents the size of the party most closely allied to the president; ^fFollowing the president's decision to leave the United Democratic Front (UDF) and form the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP).

a number of countries have experimented with premier-presidential arrangements at particular periods of time: Armenia (after 2005) and Ukraine (2006–2010).

The presidential toolbox

To derive the tools that presidents use to manage diverse coalitions, we compare the existing literature on the strategies utilized by executives across the three regions. In the following review of the presidential literature on Latin America, the former Soviet Union, and Africa, we integrate several streams of research that have hitherto been disconnected. This inductive approach leads to the classification of

presidential tools into five broad clusters: *agenda power* (legislative powers awarded to the president, executive decree authority), *budgetary prerogatives* (control of public spending), *cabinet management* (distribution of portfolios to alliance members), *partisan powers* (influence of the president over one or more coalition parties), and *informal institutions* (a diverse residual category reflecting country-specific historical and cultural factors, which we therefore approach inductively across our cases below).

Latin America's 'proactive presidents'

The early comparative literature on executive-legislative relations under presidentialism was heavily influenced by the Latin American experience. This literature traces its origins to the early 1990s, approximately the moment at which comparativists first began to test the Linzian hypotheses empirically. Scholars did so by naturally turning to Latin America as the region with the greatest number of presidential regimes, and they were influenced by the theoretical perspectives ascendant in comparative politics at the time, for example, rational choice institutionalism and especially principal-agent models (both of which in turn had been imported from contemporaneous research agendas on the US Congress). The paradigmatic work from this period is Shugart and Carey's *Presidents and Assemblies* (1992), which was the first major comparative study of presidentialism and remained the central reference on the topic until the publication of Cheibub's *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy* (2007).

Taking their lead from Shugart and Carey, scholars began to catalogue and measure formal presidential powers.³⁹ Certain legislative powers were singled out for their efficiency in guaranteeing presidential dominance, for example, decree authority⁴⁰ or vetoes.⁴¹ From a theoretical perspective, the general framework that unified these studies was 'agenda control', with the general message being that the numerous formal powers granted to Latin American presidents endowed them not only with a first-mover advantage and with significant control over legislative process, but also with the tools necessary to form and maintain multiparty support coalitions within legislatures.⁴²

A favourite case study was Brazil, judged by Shugart and Carey to have the most powerful presidency in the democratic world as of 1991. Several key tools permit the Brazilian executive to establish and defend the bargaining status quo, thus helping to keep coalitions together.⁴³ The most striking power in the Constitution of 1988 is the ability of the president to legislate via executive decrees (*medidas provisórias*). Executive decrees not only give the president the power to legislate immediately and without congressional approval, they also give her influence over the ongoing legislative agenda.⁴⁴ Presidents can call Congress out of recess at will, and special sessions deal exclusively with executive initiatives. The Brazilian Constitution also allows the president to defend the status quo by reacting to the legislature's attempt to change it, either through package or line-item vetoes. Furthermore, the executive has the prerogative to dislodge a bill

from a committee by requesting urgency, sending it immediately to floor consideration. With the president enjoying such immense agenda-setting powers, it is perhaps not surprising that approximately 80% of all legislation in Brazil over the past two decades has originated in executive proposals, and that the three presidents since 1995 have found it possible to assemble supermajoritarian coalitions surpassing 70% of the seats in the lower house.

In explaining coalitional politics, the strong formal powers of Latin American presidents drew significant attention because they are constitutionally codified, frequently used, and (relatively) easy to document and measure. By the end of the 1990s, a consensus had emerged that many Latin American presidents enjoyed institutional powers which allowed them to overcome the challenges posed by proportional representation and party fragmentation.⁴⁵ However, despite the intuitive appeal of constitutional powers, not all studies shared this formalist impulse. Some scholars preferred to emphasize the strategic dimensions of cabinet formation: many presidents chose to elicit legislative support by recruiting ministers from other parties, even though they are not constitutionally required to do so in any Latin American case.⁴⁶ Cabinet inclusiveness is essentially a *political* choice, and it is a function of the partisan powers of the president as well as of the ideological distribution within the assembly. Other scholars emphasized informal practices, such as patronage politics and extra-institutional deal making, whether in the allocation of state power⁴⁷ or in vertical relationships between presidents and subnational executives.⁴⁸ Still others began to investigate contextual and less tangible aspects of presidential power, such as popularity.⁴⁹ Thus, the ability of Latin American presidents to manage multiparty coalitions and win legislative support is not reducible to their formal powers: informal institutions, micropolitical interactions, and contextual variables all play some role.

'Superpresidentialism' and 'patronal presidentialism' in the former Soviet Union

Although technically semi-presidential, the constitutions of many post-Soviet states also concentrate a high degree of formal power in the office of the president. During the post-communist transitions of the 1990s, post-Soviet constitution makers were keenly aware of the obstacles that systems of separated powers presented to their rulers. This is illustrated by comparative indexes that have been used to measure the concentration of presidential power in the new post-Soviet constitutions.⁵⁰ They show that even across the post-communist world the formal powers of presidents in the non-Baltic former Soviet Union greatly exceed their counterparts elsewhere in Eastern Europe. Consequently, many of the post-Soviet political systems were rebranded 'superpresidential' by country specialists.⁵¹

This focus on the formal concentration of presidential power, especially within the legislative realm, has produced analysis that downgrades the significance of institutional and political constraints, notably parliaments and parties.⁵² Echoing earlier studies of so-called 'delegative democracies' in Latin America,⁵³ presidents

are portrayed as essentially unrestrained between elections, with the electoral process itself open to manipulation. In policy-making, presidents are able to get their way using a variety of formal powers. Emphasis is placed on the high concentration of the proactive law-making authority that presidents have at their disposal. They include *inter alia* decree powers and the power to arbitrate in inter-branch conflicts.⁵⁴

Superpresidentialism is also interpreted as the formal manifestation of a system of neo-patrimonialism, which empowers presidents in other ways. The weakness of institutional checks and balances is portrayed as a legacy of Soviet political culture, which enabled leaders to govern through patronage and personal rule.⁵⁵ This form of 'patronal presidentialism', Hale asserts, combines great formal power with informal power and resources derived from the networks of patron-client relations that span the state and economy.⁵⁶

Thus, scholars of the post-Soviet world have generally agreed that the collapse of communism produced political systems that greatly empowered presidents at the expense of alternative centres of institutional power. The 'superpresidential' or 'patronal' presidencies of the region have coexisted with legislatures that enjoy relatively low levels of public confidence. As a consequence, the theoretical claim that the instability of presidentialism is caused by its dual channels of legitimacy – the separate election of the president and parliament – has not materialized in the way hypothesized by Linz. On the contrary, it is the overconcentration of power in the presidency that is the source of presidentialism's vulnerability in the former Soviet Union. The 'colour revolutions' in the region have occurred as a result of less seemingly perilous institutional arrangements: presidential term limits.⁵⁷

Yet, notwithstanding their significant institutional powers, in a number of cases early post-Soviet presidents lacked the party support needed to bind coalitions in parliament (see Table 1). Contrary to stereotype, presidents were not able to maintain coalitions via executive decree authority. In Russia, for example, the fact that presidential decrees are subordinate to parliamentary statutes in the Russian Constitution deprived presidents of the authority to guarantee credible commitments in substantive policy areas.⁵⁸ Although Boris Yeltsin in particular favoured the use of decrees in the absence of parliamentary support, the threat to use his decree authority was never sufficient on its own to force legislators to capitulate to presidential legislative demands. In practice, Yeltsin and other post-Soviet presidents found that formal legislative powers are most effective when they are used in combination with other tools: decrees provide an important means of distributing patronage in the political system,⁵⁹ and the power of presidents to initiate legislation is a decisive resource only when presidents have reliable partisan tools of control.

Over the last decade, post-Soviet presidents have become increasingly reliant on their partisan powers to build more reliable coalitions. In Russia, the executive's partisan authority was significantly strengthened during President Putin's rule with the formation of a pro-Kremlin legislative coalition of four parties, which later became

United Russia. This development brought the parliament's agenda-setting bodies under the president's control, and the partisan power-sharing of the Yeltsin years was replaced by a legislative system that became highly majoritarian.⁶⁰

However, partisan powers have not been a perfect substitute for other tools. Although Russian presidents today have far greater control over budgetary resources than was the case in the 1990s,⁶¹ they have continued to use pork to reconcile distributive legislative conflicts within the presidential party, United Russia.⁶² In other post-Soviet states budgetary pork and side payments, such as patronage, are still important for cementing presidential support. Cabinet appointments in Ukraine and Armenia, for instance, appear to have been more frequently used than is the case in Russia, and are thus closer to the patterns identified for Latin America by Amorim Neto.⁶³ Moreover, even in Russia, cabinet appointments did prove to be an important resource in the 1990s when Boris Yeltsin was forced to accommodate a hostile parliament.⁶⁴

Finally, post-Soviet presidents have been shown to influence coalition formation in a variety of informal ways, especially by addressing the particularistic concerns of legislators. Since 1993, the business lobbying of deputies has been a prominent feature of legislative politics in the region. To further their interests, legislators rely on their informal relationships with ministries and other executive agencies; these connections give presidents the means to form legislative cartels. Studies of Ukrainian legislative politics allude to vote buying, which has included patronage, intimidation, and bribery.⁶⁵ During the presidency of Victor Yanukovich (2010–), this practice was enhanced by procedural changes that enabled individual deputies to defect from opposition parties to the president's governing coalition.⁶⁶ Thus, there is much more to the story than just formal constitutional powers.

'Paper' legislatures and 'Big Man' rule in African presidentialism

The literature on the process of political liberalization in Africa from the late 1980s onwards is in broad agreement that the reintroduction of multiparty politics in the early 1990s did little to undercut the capacity of incumbent presidents to dominate the political landscape.⁶⁷ In most cases, political liberalization did not extend to the introduction of serious constitutional constraints on presidential power. Especially in the continent's former one-party states, such as Kenya and Zambia, governments legalized opposition parties but effected little change to the rest of the constitutional architecture. Even in regimes like South Africa and Benin that underwent a negotiated transition, presidential powers of appointment and access to resources combined with the low technical capacity of parliaments typically resulted in a pattern of legislative subservience.⁶⁸ Moreover, in those francophone countries that adopted semi-presidentialism, the dual executive has rarely hindered presidents from operating with the same degree of unfettered authority, even during periods of cohabitation.⁶⁹

Although the formal agenda-setting powers available to most presidents are well understood, many scholars have placed greater weight on the impact of the informal rules of the game, most notably the influence of neo-patrimonial networks. Established patterns of informal behaviour are seen to erode the significance of formal institutions in Africa, in ways similar to the post-Soviet cases discussed above. In the African context, presidents are understood to wield power through highly personalized patron-client networks that are typically – but not exclusively – organized around ethno-regional communities.⁷⁰ Such networks may enable ordinary voters to exert a ‘pull’ on their clients but they are also highly unequal and empower ‘Big Men’ to circumvent the formal rules of the game.⁷¹ Culturalist analyses have generally displaced the study of formal institutions, which are depicted as existing solely on paper.⁷²

While it is important not to underestimate the significance of informal processes in Africa, this overriding preoccupation of the literature has obscured the challenges presidents face when interacting with parliaments, and the variety of tools they use to manage legislative relations. Scholars frequently ignore the fact that many African presidents face deeply divided legislatures in which they lack a clear majority. In Africa’s highly fragmented party systems, such as Benin, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Malawi, the party of the president has often won just a fraction of the seats within parliament (see Table 1). In such a context presidents are forced to operate more like prime ministers, carefully constructing legislative alliances, just as in many Latin American cases. The personal distribution of funds and favours remain important in this process, but the formal capacity of presidents to control the legislative agenda and their ability to manage the cabinet effectively are equally critical to legislative success. For example, presidents typically seek to meet the challenge of coalitional presidentialism by constructing broad alliances cemented through the appointment of larger cabinets that are more representative of the balance of parties within parliament.⁷³ In Benin, where the president’s party has regularly secured less than a quarter of parliamentary seats, the executive has had little choice but to engage in complex processes of alliance formation, appointing representatives of opposition parties to the cabinet.⁷⁴ Thus, as in Latin America, the size and the composition of the cabinet have been of central importance to the ability of the executive to control parliament. Yet expanding the size of the cabinet is not without costs, as it dilutes the executive’s ability to monopolize resources and policy influence.

As formal political rules such as term-limits start to take a greater hold across the continent,⁷⁵ presidents in multiparty systems are likely to find it increasingly difficult to manage effectively their legislative alliances. Joel Barkan has argued – in one of the few texts to make legislatures a focus of the analysis – that in a small but important number of countries, reform-minded MPs have been able to increase the powers and technical capacity of parliament since the reintroduction of multipartyism, thereby creating further challenges for incumbents.⁷⁶ Even in Kenya, often depicted as an archetypal neo-patrimonial political system, the increasing confidence of legislators and the strengthening of legislative committees

enabled MPs to investigate and publicize the involvement of the government in the Anglo Leasing scandal, leading to the resignation of a number of cabinet ministers.⁷⁷ As parliaments become more assertive, the ability of presidents to use their agenda power, budgetary prerogatives, and cabinet management tools will become increasingly significant to the battle for legislative control.

The value of cross-regional analysis for the ‘presidentialism debate’

This integration of disparate literatures throws into sharp relief the often univariate bias of much of the early comparative work on presidentialism. Our review suggests that rather than constitutional arrangements and incentives driving the dynamics of presidential regimes, in particular the legislative dimension of the separation of powers, presidents draw on a variety of tools and resources when they interact with parliaments. This finding highlights one advantage of extending the analysis of presidentialism beyond the traditional focus on the United States and Latin America, where dominant accounts have drawn heavily on constitutionally derived rational choice theories of inter-branch relations. A broader, cross-regional focus shows that the constitutional powers of presidents are by no means the only ones in play.

A wider comparative lens suggests that presidents tend to overcompensate for the anticipated perils of separated powers by utilizing a diverse set of tools, which they deploy in many different combinations. This toolbox makes the task of predicting *a priori* the dynamics of coalitional presidentialism much more complicated, and may explain why presidentialism has not had the destabilizing effects that were anticipated by the first wave of presidential scholars. It was precisely because Linz and those who followed him underestimated the capacity and flexibility of the presidential toolbox to build and maintain coalitions that they were led to the conclusion that the separation of powers inherent to presidential systems would lead to deadlock and ultimately the breakdown of new democracies. The scholarship reviewed in this article suggests that the diversity of the toolbox available to presidents is an important strategic antidote to this structural problem, and as such requires more thorough research.

Our very preliminary review here already suggests that presidents draw upon diverse resources to construct legislative support in different cultural and political contexts. In Latin America, budgetary authority and cabinet management have emerged as the dominant tools used to buttress the agenda-setting power of presidents. This contrasts with Africa, where cabinet management has played an important role, but informal institutions have been the dominant factor enabling presidents to enjoy fully their considerable agenda-setting powers. The former Soviet Union lies somewhere in between: informal institutions have been important, but partisan powers have now become one of the main tools that enable presidents to manage divided legislatures. But while there are important variations, there are also important commonalities across the three regions. Patronage – unfortunately one of the most difficult resources to operationalize and quantify – is one

resource that presidents seem to favour everywhere. The extent to which patronage becomes part of the open political process (such as in the allocation of ministerial portfolios) does vary across regions, but its importance in bolstering presidential power is a constant across Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union.

Political context, especially changing levels of popular and parliamentary support, plays an important role in the selection and utility of tools. In Russia, presidents have tended to favour partisan tools of control when politically powerful, whereas in Brazil the tools of choice have been cabinet access and generous allocations of pork. Despite considerable formal powers, Kenyan presidents lacking a strong parliamentary majority have relied heavily on their ability to appoint cabinet ministers and their control over patronage resources.

We also find that when presidents act they typically utilize a multiplicity of tools, and the combinations of tools that they choose affect the usage and strength of other parts of the presidential toolkit. Univariate accounts fail to capture the dynamics of how presidents select, abandon, and combine tools. Evidence exists that certain tools can be substituted, often imperfectly, by other tools in response to changing political circumstances.⁷⁸ But the choice of tools is not random. Other things being equal, presidents prefer to rely on their agenda and partisan powers, because handing out cabinet seats, pork, and patronage are costly both in terms of resources and in terms of potential agency loss. When presidents lose partisan support or have their agenda powers cut, they may be forced to compensate by relying more heavily on other tools. In the case of Brazil, Lula and Cardoso clearly transferred more budgetary resources to individual legislators when faced with unfavourable political environments (for example, corruption scandals or dwindling popularity). In Ukraine and Russia, the president's weak partisan powers in the 1990s necessitated Kuchma and Yeltsin to employ their cabinet management powers to build legislative support in times of political crisis, and the bargaining that took place tended to be over distributive issues rather than policy. Thus, in conditions of weak partisan powers Kuchma and Yeltsin used a combination of cabinet management, informal, and budgetary tools to build legislative support.

In Kenya, President Kibaki took still another multi-track approach to a volatile assembly by expanding the size of the cabinet, increasing the level of funds flowing through the ruling party's patron-client networks, and exploiting his residual control over the legislative agenda via the Speaker. Thus, Kibaki blended cabinet management, informal institutions, and agenda power into a single coherent strategy for coalition management. President Nicéphore Soglo of Benin deployed a similar combination of tools following his election in 1991. Facing a parliament in which the largest party controlled just 19% of the seats, Soglo constructed a series of coalitions by extending patronage and including opposition parties in the cabinet, but also invested in his informal patron-client network to exert influence over the parliamentary agenda by the back door.⁷⁹ Although the range of tools deployed by Soglo enabled him to avoid permanent deadlock despite a deeply divided legislature, parliament rejected the president's budget in

1994, demonstrating that weak partisan powers may undermine the ability of the executive to effectively deploy other tools. As examples like these show, it is more productive analytically to focus on toolboxes, and the way that tools can be combined in different admixtures, than on individual tools.

Yet, this review also suggests that while the effectiveness of the toolbox has enabled presidents to ameliorate some of the problems identified by earlier scholars of presidentialism, presidential empowerment has come with its own set of negative consequences. The provision of multiple and powerful tools to presidents may retard the development of robust and autonomous institutions capable of resisting executive manipulation. The tendency for presidents to overcompensate for the shortcomings of separated powers produces executive-centric politics that in many cases reduces legislative capacity, horizontal accountability, transparency, and stunts the development of political parties.

The scale of this problem clearly differs from region to region and is related to the particular admixture of tools used by presidents. Authoritarian outcomes in the post-Soviet world have generally not been replicated in Latin America, with the partial exception of Venezuela. But, there are similarities in terms of the effects of certain tools. The distribution of side payments to coalition partners, especially in the form of patronage, has impeded transparency, and has curtailed the development of programmatic parties. This has been particularly problematic in Africa and the former Soviet Union, where presidents have been more likely to rely on 'invisible' transfers and patronage rather than officially recorded pork. Thus, the strengthening of the president's partisan powers in the former Soviet Union has not produced greater programmatic coherence in legislative decision-making. In Latin America, the deployment of patronage and pork has also had negative consequences for executive accountability.⁸⁰ It has enabled presidents to evade legislative scrutiny by mitigating the ideological, ethnic, or historical barriers that have traditionally separated parties. Across all three regions, then, pork and patronage have undermined the capacity of legislatures to enforce horizontal accountability and to facilitate the emergence of more stable and robust party systems.

We have now come full circle back to the 'presidentialism debate' referenced in the introduction to this article. Twenty years of research have shown presidentialism to be remarkably durable, and in particular its multiparty variant has vastly overperformed relative to early predictions. It is tempting to claim now that this 'success' is due to the effective formation of interparty coalitions and thus declare an end to the debate. However, we still know very little about the tools of coalition formation in comparative perspective, and about how these tools work in combination. The very same presidential tools that enhance governability may also undermine accountability – a tradeoff that has been largely overlooked even as analysts celebrate the survival of multiparty presidential democracy. This built-in tradeoff of presidentialism is far more perilous to the political systems that exist in Africa, Latin America, and the former Soviet Union than the dual legitimacy generated by separated powers. The governability versus accountability tradeoff is a persistent challenge to emerging presidential systems

and should form the basis for a new research agenda that focuses on presidentialism and its second-generation perils.

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Notes

1. See Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh, 'Government Coalitions and Legislative Success'.
2. Mainwaring and Shugart, *Presidentialism and Democracy*.
3. Raile, Pereira, and Power, 'The Executive Toolbox'.
4. Linz, 'Perils of Presidentialism'; Mainwaring, 'Presidentialism, Multipartyism and Democracy'; Stepan and Skach, 'Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation'.
5. Colomer and Negretto, 'Can Presidentialism Work Like Parliamentarism?'.
6. Elgie, 'From Linz to Tsebelis'.
7. Linz, 'Perils of Presidentialism'.
8. Mainwaring, 'Presidentialism, Multipartyism and Democracy'.
9. Chasquetti, *Democracia, presidencialismo y partidos políticos*.
10. Deheza, 'Gobiernos de coalición en el sistema presidencial'; Amorim Neto, 'Presidents, Parties, and Ministers'; Pereira, 'Conditions for Presidential Success'; Altman, 'Politics of Coalition Formation'; Zelaznik, 'Building of Coalitions'; Mejia Acosta, 'Ghost Coalitions'; Martínez-Gallardo, 'Presidents, Posts, and Policy'; Martorelli Hernández, 'Beyond Deadlock?'; Zucco, 'Political Economy of Ordinary Politics'.
11. Samuels and Shugart, *Presidents, Parties, Prime Ministers*.
12. *Ibid.*, 16.
13. *Ibid.*, 17.
14. *Ibid.*, 16.
15. Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*.
16. Van de Walle, 'Presidentialism and Clientelism'.
17. Whitmore, 'Faction Institutionalization and Parliamentary Development'; Remington, 'Presidential Support in the Russian State Duma'; Bagashka, 'Presidentialism and the Development of Party Systems'.
18. Power and Gasiorowski, 'Institutional Design and Democratic Consolidation'; Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh, 'Government Coalitions and Legislative Success'; Cheibub, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*.
19. Przeworski, 'Some Problems in the Study of Transitions to Democracy'; O'Donnell, 'Illusions About Consolidation'.
20. Lijphart, *Patterns of Democracy*.
21. Cheibub, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*.
22. Linz, 'Presidential or Parliamentary Democracy'.
23. Figueiredo and Limongi, 'Presidential Power, Legislative Organization, and Party Behavior'; Amorim Neto, Cox, and McCubbins, 'Agenda Power in Brazil's Câmara dos Deputados, 1989 to 1999'.

24. Amorim Neto, 'Presidential Cabinets, Electoral Cycles, and Coalition Discipline'; Martínez-Gallardo, 'Presidents, Posts, and Policy'.
25. Ames, *The Deadlock of Democracy*.
26. Raile, Pereira, and Power, 'The Executive Toolbox'.
27. Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*.
28. Elgie, 'Semi-presidentialism and Comparative Constitutional Engineering'.
29. O'Donnell, 'Illusions About Consolidation'; Helmke and Levitsky, 'Introduction'.
30. Riggs, 'Survival of Presidentialism'; Azari and Smith, 'Unwritten Rules'.
31. Chaisty, *Legislative Politics and Economic Power*.
32. Berman, 'Ethnicity, Patronage and the African State'; Bratton, 'Formal versus Informal Institutions'.
33. Neustadt, *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*.
34. Prempeh, 'Presidents Untamed'.
35. Shugart and Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies*; Power and Gasiorowski, 'Institutional Design and Democratic Consolidation'; Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh, 'Government Coalitions and Legislative Success'; Cheibub, *Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, and Democracy*; Samuels and Shugart, *Presidents, Parties, Prime Ministers*; Elgie, *Semi-presidentialism*.
36. Stepan, 'Political Leadership and Regime Breakdown'; Valenzuela, *The Breakdown of Democratic Regimes*.
37. Marshall and Jagers, *Polity IV Project*.
38. Hence, Russia is excluded after 2003, and Kenya is only included from 2002.
39. Metcalf, 'Measuring Presidential Power'; Payne, Zovatto G., Carrillo Flórez, and Allamand Zavala, *Democracies in Development*.
40. Negretto, 'Government Capacities and Policymaking by Decree'.
41. Alemán and Schwartz, 'Presidential Vetoes in Latin American Constitutions'.
42. Chasquetti, 'Democracia, multipartidismo y coaliciones'; Cox and Morgenstern, 'Latin America's Reactive Assemblies'; Figueiredo and Limongi, 'Presidential Power, Legislative Organization, and Party Behavior'; Foweraker, 'Institutional Design, Party Systems and Governability'; Tsebelis and Alemán, 'Presidential Conditional Agenda Setting'.
43. Figueiredo and Limongi, 'Presidential Power, Legislative Organization, and Party Behavior'.
44. Pereira, Power, and Rennó, 'Under What Conditions Do Presidents Resort to Decree Power?'; Pereira, Power, and Rennó, 'Agenda Power'.
45. Foweraker, 'Institutional Design, Party Systems and Governability'.
46. Amorim Neto, 'Presidential Cabinets, Electoral Cycles, and Coalition Discipline'; Amorim Neto, 'Presidential Calculus'; Martínez-Gallardo, 'Presidents, Posts, and Policy'.
47. Mejía Acosta, 'Ghost Coalitions'.
48. Jones, 'Evaluating Argentina's Presidential Democracy'; Samuels and Abrucio, 'Federalism and Democratic Transitions'; De Luca, 'Political Recruitment and Candidate Selection in Argentina'.
49. Pereira, Power, and Rennó, 'Under What Conditions Do Presidents Resort to Decree Power?'; Pereira, Power, and Rennó, 'Agenda Power'; Schwandt-Bayer, 'How Presidents Legislate'.
50. Hellman, 'Constitutions and Economic Reform'; Frye, 'A Politics of Institutional Choice'.
51. Holmes, 'Superpresidentialism and its Problems'; Ishiyama and Kennedy, 'Superpresidentialism and Political Party Development'; Fish, *Democracy Derailed*.
52. Fish, 'Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies'.
53. O'Donnell, 'Delegative Democracy'.

54. Kubicek, 'Delegative Democracy in Russia and Ukraine'; Parrish, 'Presidential Decree Authority in Russia'; Beliaev, 'Presidential Powers and Consolidation of New Postcommunist Democracies'.
55. Robinson, 'The Presidency'; Hale, 'Regime Cycles'.
56. Hale, 'Regime Cycles'.
57. Ibid.
58. Remington, Smith, and Haspel, 'Decrees, Laws and Inter Branch Relations'.
59. Protsyk, 'Ruling with Decrees'.
60. Chaisty, 'The Legislative Effects of Presidential Partisan Powers'.
61. Thames, 'Patronage and the Presidential Critique'.
62. Remington, 'Patronage and the Party of Power'.
63. Amorim Neto, 'Presidential Calculus'.
64. Morgan-Jones and Schleiter, 'Governmental Change in a President-Parliamentary Regime'.
65. Van Zon, 'Political Culture and Neo-patrimonialism'.
66. Haran, 'From Viktor to Viktor'.
67. Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*; Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*.
68. Bierschenk, Thioléron, and Bako-Arifari, 'Institutionalising the PRSP Approach in Benin'.
69. Van Cranenburgh, "'Big Men" Rule'; Cheeseman and Tendi, 'Power Sharing in Comparative Perspective'.
70. Medard, 'The Underdeveloped State in Tropical Africa'.
71. Kim et al., *The Legislative Connection*; Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective*.
72. Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*. Even among those political scientists who are more sympathetic to institutionalist approaches, formal legislative structures and rules are largely downplayed. For example, parliaments comprise just two pages of Bratton and van de Walle's seminal *Democratic Experiments in Africa* (1997) and do not even feature in the index of Goran Hyden's *African Politics in Comparative Perspective* (2005).
73. Cheeseman, 'Unity Versus Spoils'.
74. Adamolekun and Laleye, 'Benin'. In some elections presidents in Benin have officially run as independents, although it is widely accepted that they are supported by particular parties or electoral coalitions.
75. Posner and Young, 'The Institutionalization of Political Power'.
76. Barkan, *Legislative Power in Emerging African Democracies*.
77. World Bank, *Understanding the Evolving Role of the Kenya National Assembly*.
78. Raile, Pereira, and Power, 'The Executive Toolbox'.
79. Adamolekun and Laleye, 'Benin'.
80. Mainwaring and Welna, *Democratic Accountability in Latin America*.

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