

Presidential Elections in Semi-Presidential Systems: Presidential Powers, Electoral Turnout and the Performance of Government-Endorsed Candidates

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Abstract

Although a large body of research has been produced both on semi-presidential regimes and patterns of electoral change from general elections to midterm or other non-general elections, the study of presidential elections in semi-presidential regimes remains, to quote one of the few exceptions in this regard, “uncharted territory” in the political science literature. Using a dataset on election results and turnout levels in all semi-presidential democracies since 1945, we test several hypotheses about changes in turnout levels and government parties and coalitions’ gains and losses in presidential elections. We show that while semi-presidential democracies with weaker presidencies do approximate the patterns predicted by the “second-order” model, that is clearly not the case where presidents hold more considerable powers, where government losses are explained by “negative voting” and “balancing” theories. The implications of these findings for the very definition of “semi-presidentialism” and the consequences of these regimes are also discussed.

Keywords: Semi-presidentialism; Presidential elections; Electoral cycle

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1. Introduction

Political systems where presidents are popularly elected but coexist with a head of the executive responsible before parliament have attracted the attention of a growing body of literature. Although terminological and conceptual debates as to their distinctiveness and internal diversity have yet to be settled, all or most of such regimes are commonly called “semi-presidential” (Duverger, 1980), and their relevance as objects of study has undoubtedly increased in recent years, particularly since democratic transitions in Eastern Europe gave rise to an important number of them (Baylis, 1996; Duverger, 1997).

Most of this literature has debated two fundamental issues. The first is the very definition of “semi-presidentialism”. Some have argued that the only logical and consequential theoretical definition is one that focuses exclusively on the regime’s “dispositional properties”, i.e., as systems where “a popularly-elected, fixed-term president exists alongside a prime minister and cabinet who are responsible to parliament” (Elgie 1999: p. 13). Conversely, others have insisted in the need to take into account each system’s “relational properties”, i.e., the power of political actors in general and of the presidency in particular, leading them, in some cases, to identify sub-types of semi-presidential regimes (Duverger, 1980; Shugart and Carey, 1992; Sartori, 1997; Roper, 2002) and, in others, to discard the category altogether (Siaroff, 2003).¹ A second

¹ Others still have tended to devalue the institutional debate in itself, defining semi-presidentialism as a regime that alternates between presidential and parliamentary phases (Lijphart, 1999:8).

major issue debated in this literature concerns the implications of semi-presidentialism for democratic stability and accountability. One particularly acute question is whether and in what conditions does semi-presidentialism's "dual democratic legitimacy" produces detrimental consequences, particularly in what concerns political representation and accountability or the likelihood of high level institutional conflict over policies between presidents and prime minister from opposite partisan blocs (see, for example, Shugart and Carey, 1992; Linz, 1994; Neto and Strøm, 2002, Schleiter and Morgan-Jones, 2005).

However, one particular question about semi-presidentialism has seldom been asked: what kind of elections are presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies? This is an unfortunate silence in the political science literature. First, elections that do not serve to determine the composition of the executive, and the kind of patterns of electoral change vis-à-vis general elections they exhibit, have been the object of considerable attention in the literature, and the theories developed to study them could conceivably be extended to the study of presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies. In the United States, for example, several theoretical approaches have been advanced in order to account for the losses typically experienced by the party controlling the Presidency in midterm congressional elections (for a review, see Erikson, 1988). And in the European context, the concept of "second-order" elections has been introduced to account for a comparable phenomenon, i.e., the tendency of large parties — particularly government parties — to experience losses in European Parliament elections in comparison with their previous performance in general legislative elections (see, among many, Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Reif, 1997; Marsh, 1998; Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004; and Schmitt,

2005). However, although it has been suggested that “elections to choose a non-executive head of state” should also show second-order effects (van der Eijk et al., 1996: 150; see also Marsh, 2000: 289), and although such effects have indeed been detected in elections other than those for the European Parliament (Anderson and Ward, 1996; McLean et al., 1996; Jeffery and Hough, 2001; and Freire, 2004), it remains to be examined whether presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies display similar features.

Second, the study of presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies could conceivably contribute to illuminate aspects of the debates about the nature and consequences of the latter. The detection of similar patterns of electoral change among all or most semi-presidential regimes could strengthen the arguments of those that tend to stress this regime-type’s internal coherence and distinctiveness vis-à-vis other types of political system. Conversely, the discovery of systematic variations in this respect *within* semi-presidential regimes, especially if those variations are structured around institutional features such as presidential powers and prerogatives, could tip the scale in favour of those that have stressed semi-presidentialism’s internal diversity and the need to take each case’s “relational properties” into account. Finally, the examination of patterns and causes of government’s losses and gains in presidential elections speaks directly to the study of the political consequences of semi-presidentialism, particularly of the factors favouring partisan compatibility or cohabitation between presidents and prime-ministers in those regimes (Shugart and Carey, 1992; Elgie, 2001), a relevant issue when we consider how cohabitation may contribute to inter-institutional conflicts or affect voters’ ability to identify who is accountable for political outputs

This article provides what we believe to be the first systematic cross-national exploration of presidential elections from 1945 to 2005 in the world's nineteen semi-presidential democracies. Using aggregate data on turnout and the vote shares obtained by government parties and government-endorsed candidates in both legislative and presidential elections, this article examines patterns and causes of two different variables that have been recurrently studied in research focusing on non-general election results: differences in turnout levels between legislative and presidential elections; and the extent to which national government parties are likely to experience electoral losses in presidential elections.

2. (Semi-)presidential elections as low-salience elections

Of the several theoretical approaches that have been used to explain changes from general to non-general elections, two of them make somewhat similar assumptions about the comparatively lower importance of the latter for voters and its implications. One is the “surge and decline” hypothesis (Campbell, 1960). Originally developed to account for the recurrent losses experienced by the American President's party in Congressional midterm elections, it suggests that what makes these elections different is the intensity and character of the political stimulation they provide. Where choices have less important political consequences, as in the case of midterm elections, the stimulation to vote will be lower. However, lower turnout is not the only thing we should expect from such “low-stimulus” elections. On the one hand, many of the voters who tend to be absent in those elections are the “peripheral” and non-usual voters who, in the previous high-stimulus election, has been swayed towards the party that was most advantaged by short-term

political circumstances. On the other hand, the “core” voters whose sense of the heightened importance of high-stimulus elections may have also led them to support the advantaged party will, in midterm elections, tend to return to their “usual voting position” (Campbell, 1960: 401). Thus, from both points of view, a surge for the government party in general elections is likely to be followed by a decline in midterm, non-general elections.

The “second-order model”, developed to account for the recurrent losses of both large and government parties in European Parliament elections, also suggests that elections can be distinguished on the basis of how important voters perceive them to be (Reif and Schmitt, 1980). “First-order” elections are those whose outcome is directly consequential for the distribution of political offices at the national level and for the control of the apparatus of government, and are thus more likely to be salient at the eyes of voters. By comparison, since less is perceived to be at stake in “second-order” elections, citizens are less likely to vote in them. Moreover, since the incentives to vote strategically for the formation of a government tend to be absent in the case of second-order elections, voters are more likely to express their support for the party that is closer to their preferences rather than for one of the larger parties. Finally, the supporters of governing parties, knowing that their vote in these elections are devoid of direct consequences in terms of a change in the partisan composition of the cabinet, are also likely to feel freer to use their vote to express dissatisfaction with government performance. Thus, second-order elections should display losses for larger parties in comparison with the preceding first-order elections, especially when those parties are in

government and when elections take place at the lowest point of government popularity in the electoral cycle, around the midterm.

2.1 Electoral turnout

If presidential elections in semi-presidential regimes are conceived as “low stimulus” or “low salience” elections, the first prediction that derives from that assumption is that turnout levels in those elections should be lower than in legislative elections. The first step in testing this hypothesis in our cases consists in identifying the whole range of cases of semi-presidential democracies. In a recent and exhaustive survey of comparative presidential institutions, Siaroff identifies the thirty-four historical and contemporary cases of such systems where there is “a popularly elected head of state and a separate head of government (prime minister), with the latter accountable to the legislature” (Siaroff, 2003: 299-300). There is, however, a second necessary step: restricting the analysis to those countries and periods where a democratic regime was indeed in place. For that purpose, we used Freedom House ratings, which distinguish between “free electoral democracies” and the remaining kinds of semi-democratic, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.²

Under these criteria, twelve semi-presidential systems listed by Siaroff fail to qualify as “free electoral democracies” at any moment in the period under consideration (1945-2005): Armenia, Belarus, Central African Republic, Comoros, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, Macedonia, Madagascar, Moldova, Mozambique, Russia, and Ukraine. They are

² See Freedom House, *Freedom in the World Country ratings, 1972-2005* (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/ratings/index.htm>).

thus excluded from our analysis.³ Furthermore, not all elections within the period 1945-2005 in the remaining countries can be included, since several of them were held in periods when those countries did not qualify as “free electoral democracies”. Once these criteria are applied, we are left with the cases and periods listed in table 1. The first column lists the nineteen relevant countries, followed, in parenthesis, by the periods during which their constitutions allowed both for the direct election of the head of state and for a separate head of the executive accountable before parliament. The second and fourth columns then list the dates for the first and last presidential and legislative elections that took place within the period 1945-2005 while these countries were *both* semi-presidential *and* rated as “free electoral democracies”, showing, in parenthesis, the number of elections of each type that fall within the relevant periods.⁴ Finally, columns three and five show the average turnout for each type of election for those periods.⁵

³ Siaroff’s list of semi-presidential countries does not include cases that other authors have defined as “semi-presidential” (Elgie 1999), such as Azerbaijan, Benin, Burkina Faso, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Gabon, Ghana, Guyana, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Namibia, Niger, Sri Lanka, South Korea, and Uzbekistan. However, some of these cases are clearly not semi-presidential regimes: either because executive power is constitutionally and explicitly vested upon the President or because the Prime Minister and the cabinet are not responsible before the legislature, Azerbaijan, Benin, the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Guyana, Namibia, South Korea, or Togo cannot be described as semi-presidential. Lebanon lacks presidential elections altogether. Other cases can be excluded for not qualifying as free electoral democracies in the period under consideration, or for not having held presidential elections as free electoral democracies in that period: Gabon, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Niger, Senegal, Sri Lanka, and Uzbekistan. Finally, for reasons related to the lack of access to the relevant data, we also dropped out of the analysis the pre-1945 historical cases (Uruguay 1919-1933, Germany 1919-1933, and Spain 1931-1936), as well as Burkina Faso during the two years (1978 and 1979) when it was rated as a free electoral democracy.

⁴ We coded Austria, Finland, France, Iceland, and Ireland as “free electoral democracies” in the entire period after 1945 under which they had semi-presidential systems. Conversely, although, by 1997, Mali qualified as a “free electoral democracy” on the Freedom House ratings, we decided to exclude the 1997

If presidential elections in all semi-presidential democracies were to fit the assumptions of the “surge and decline” or “second-order approaches”, we should observe systematically lower levels of turnout in presidential elections in comparison with legislative elections in these systems. However, cursory inspection of table 1 already shows that the relationship between turnout in legislative and presidential elections varies sharply across countries. To take just the more extreme examples, while turnout in Ireland was, on average, about 16 per cent *lower* in presidential elections than in legislative elections, turnout in presidential elections was, on average, 13 per cent *higher* than in legislative elections in a country like Poland.

Table 1 about here

Figure 1 shows the difference, for each country, between the average turnout levels in presidential and legislative elections. Thus, to the left of the graph, we find the semi-presidential democracies where turnout in presidential elections tends to conform to the predictions of surge-and-decline or second-order approaches: Ireland, Croatia, Cape

elections from our analysis. Legislative elections, in particular, were affected by opposition boycotts and suspicions of irregularities, which were not entirely dispelled even after the Constitutional Court ordered their repetition in July and August: see Carter Center (2002). For different reasons, the March 1991 presidential elections in São Tomé and Príncipe and the 1996 presidential elections in Cape Verde were also excluded: although the countries qualified as a “free electoral democracies” in those years, the presidential elections were not competitive: in São Tomé, Miguel Trovoadá was the sole candidate in the election after the other two remaining candidates withdrew in February, while in Cape Verde, António Mascarenhas Monteiro was also the unchallenged candidate.

⁵ Turnout data for each election obtained from the *International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance* (IDEA) Voter Turnout database (<http://www.idea.int/vt/index.cfm>).

Verde, Slovakia, Iceland, Bulgaria, Portugal, and Mongolia. However, there is an important number of semi-presidential systems where the exact opposite happens: Poland, Mali, Taiwan, São Tomé and Príncipe, France, Peru, and Lithuania. Finally, there is a smaller group of countries where the average turnout in the two types of elections is almost identical, with average differences below three percentage points: Finland, Austria, Slovenia, and Romania. In any case, the findings are discrepant with the notion that presidential elections in semi-presidential regimes can be generically treated as “low-salience” or “low-stimulus” elections from this point of view: in no less than eleven of our nineteen countries, average turnout in presidential elections is almost identical or even higher than in legislative elections.

Figure 1 about here

What may account for this variation between semi-presidential democracies? Looking at similarly puzzling results from a more reduced set of presidential elections in non-presidential regimes, Blais suggests that the difference between turnout in presidential and legislative elections is unlikely to be determined by the “‘objective’ importance of the [presidential] election”, and that the potentially lower levels of mobilization around the election of a president lacking in significant political powers may be counteracted by its more personalized nature, making it more appealing to both voters and the media (Blais, 2000: 40). The fact that, among so many of these semi-presidential democracies, average turnout in presidential elections is close to or even above that of legislative elections lends some preliminary credence to this argument.

However, we should not exclude the hypothesis that differences between turnout levels in presidential and legislative elections are indeed structured by the powers constitutionally bestowed on the presidency before testing it systematically. The first step in doing so consists in obtaining measures of presidential powers. We will rely here on what is perhaps one of the simplest and surely the most exhaustive in terms of country coverage, the one provided by Siaroff, which distinguishes between seven different presidential powers:

the ability of the president to chair formal cabinet meetings and thus engage in agenda setting (...), the power to veto legislation (...), whether the president has broad emergency or decree powers for national disorder and/or economic matters which are effectively valid for an unlimited time (...), whether the president has a central role in foreign policy (...), the discretionary appointment (...) of some key individuals such as the prime minister, other cabinet ministers, high court judges, senior military figures and/or central bankers (...), the ability to select, remove, and/or keep from office a given individual as prime minister, and/or a given party as part of the cabinet (...) and the ability (...) to dissolve the legislature at will, at most subject to only temporal restrictions (Siaroff 2003: 304-305).

Table 2 shows the powers of the presidency in all nineteen semi-presidential democracies considered thus far, coding the presence (1) or absence (0) of each power and computing a simple additive index for each country (*Presidential Powers Index*), which was used to sort cases from the most to the least powerful presidencies. Since Finland, Poland, and Portugal experienced constitutional amendments throughout this

period with direct impact on the powers of the presidency, separate indexes were computed for the periods during which different constitutional rules touching on presidential powers prevailed, leading to a total of 24 measures of presidential powers for our 19 countries.

Table 2 about here

We can now assess the plausibility of the hypothesis that differences in turnout between presidential and legislative elections are related to presidential powers. Taking countries as our unit of analysis, the correlation of the *Presidential Powers Index* with the average difference between presidential and legislative elections' turnout for each country is .41, of moderate strength but nevertheless statistically significant at $p < .05$ with just 23 cases.⁶ In other words, more powers bestowed on the presidency seem to be related with higher turnout in presidential elections in comparison with legislative elections.

We can examine this relationship more systematically by shifting our unit of analysis from the level of the country to each concrete presidential election, while introducing several crucial control variables. In the following analysis, our dependent variable is the difference between turnout in each presidential election and the preceding legislative election (*Turnout Change*). In our nineteen countries, 74 instances of presidential elections – preceded by legislative elections, taking place between 1945 and

⁶ Post-2000 Finland is excluded for lack of observations concerning turnout in presidential elections up to 2005.

2005, and under a semi-presidential “free electoral democracy” – can be identified.⁷ The *Presidential Powers Index*, measured at the time of each presidential election, is our crucial independent variable: we expect that, to the extent that variations in presidential power are politically consequential and perceived by voters, more powers for the president should result in greater salience of the elections held to elect him or her and greater mobilization efforts by parties and candidates, leading thus to greater turnout levels in comparison with legislative elections.

The effect of presidential powers in turnout change is estimated while controlling for the effects of three additional factors. The first is whether there was an incumbent running for re-election (1) or not (0) in the presidential election in question (*Incumbent Running*). Incumbency gives candidates an inbuilt advantage in terms of public recognition and the political and organizational resources they can put in place to seek re-election. As Jones shows, looking at a large sample of presidential elections in both presidential and semi-presidential systems since 1940, presidential incumbents running for re-election won in four out of every five elections (Jones, 2004: 80). This suggests that the presence of an incumbent is likely to decrease the competitiveness of presidential elections, thus decreasing turnout.⁸ We therefore expect this variable to have a negative

⁷ Since the logic of the analysis lies in the comparison between presidential elections’ turnout and that of immediately preceding legislative elections, we excluded all presidential elections that were not preceded by any legislative election in the period during which the country had a democratic semi-presidential regime. Cases where a presidential election was preceded by another presidential election (rather than a legislative election) were also excluded. When concurrent presidential and legislative elections were held, turnout in the former was compared with turnout in the latter, although table 3 also shows computations excluding those cases.

⁸ In fact, it is likely that the negative effect of a running incumbent on our dependent variable will always be underestimated, since countries like Iceland or Ireland have constitutional provisions that have allowed

effect on the dependent variable: when sitting presidents are running for re-election, the turnout of presidential elections when compared with that of the immediately preceding legislative elections should be lower.

The second control variable is the number of years — the number of days divided by 365 — between the date of the presidential election and the date of the immediately preceding legislative election (*Years since Legislative Election*). Turnout in any election seems to increase the furthest away the most recent previous election it has taken place (Franklin, 2002: 159). We therefore expect this variable to produce a positive effect: the more time has passed between the presidential and the preceding legislative election, the greater the turnout in the former is likely to be in comparison with the latter. Finally, we add *Turnout in the Preceding Legislative Election* as a control variable. Since differences among countries and elections in terms of turnout can be caused by a large number of systemic and contextual factors, we add this variable to the model in order to be able to estimate the effects of our relevant explanatory variable on a stable base of electoral participation in legislative elections. Table 3 shows the results of the test of these hypotheses both using the entire sample and in the sub-sample of cases where legislative and presidential elections were not concurrent.⁹

them to routinely waive presidential elections when a candidate — normally the incumbent — is unchallenged and where, conceivably, any election that would up taking place would certainly be lacking in competitiveness and, thus, salience for voters.

⁹ Cases of concurrent legislative and presidential elections in our sample include Romania (1996, 2000, and 2004), Peru (1980 and 1985), Slovenia in 1992, and Taiwan in 1996. Since concurrent elections are likely to neutralize differences in any direction between turnout in legislative and presidential elections, we expect the model's fit to improve in the set of countries where legislative and presidential elections were held at different points in time.

Table 3 about here

As we can see in table 3, the coefficients for the variables *Incumbent Running*, *Turnout in the Preceding Legislative Election*, and *Years since Legislative Election* all have the predicted signs: negative for the first two, and positive for the third. None of them reach, however, statistical significance at the conventional levels. But the central finding concerns the impact of presidential powers in the difference in turnout between presidential and legislative elections: keeping other things equal, the more powers to the presidency, the larger turnout in presidential elections tends to be in comparison to legislative elections. The models' explained variance is slightly higher when applied to the cases without concurrent elections.

Thus, in several countries, levels of turnout in presidential elections are higher than what the lack of proper executive powers of such presidents might suggest. And from the point of view of turnout levels, not all semi-presidential democracies seem to conform to the expectation that they should be "low salience" or "low stimulus" elections. However, those that do also tend to be the ones that take place in semi-presidential systems where elected presidents enjoy less powers. In other words, presidential powers do account for levels of turnout, and as we saw from the initial correlational analysis made at the level of countries, these results are not likely to be a function of the particular composition of the sample in terms of the number of elections considered per country. The question that follows, then, is whether presidential powers are also consequential to the extent to which presidential elections conform to another prediction of "surge and decline" and "second-order theories": the existence of systematic government losses.

2.2 Government gains and losses: measurement issues

Like legislative elections, European Parliament elections are fought by parties seeking to gain seats in a legislative chamber. But unlike legislative elections, presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies are fought by candidates who seek to occupy an individual office. It is true that most of these candidates tend to receive the explicit endorsement of political parties. However, there are cases where a one-to-one match between each political party competing on national legislative elections and each presidential candidate is absent. Since the objective here is to compare government parties' shares of the vote in legislative elections with government candidates' shares of the vote in presidential elections, this creates particular measurement problems that need to be addressed from the outset.

In some cases, measuring "government's share of the vote" in both legislative and presidential elections turns out to be relatively simple. For example, in the April 1971 Austrian presidential elections, the Social Democratic Party (SPÖ), by then the sole party supporting the government, endorsed the re-election bid of Franz Jonas. His share of the vote, 52.8 percent — against Kurt Waldheim's 47.2 percent — can be easily compared with SPÖ's share of the vote in the preceding March 1970 legislative elections (48.1 percent). Things become slightly more complex in cases where two or more parties forming a governmental coalition support one or more presidential candidates. Thus, for example — and to stick with the Austrian example — the May 1986 presidential elections saw the SPÖ and the FPÖ (the Austrian Freedom Party), which by then still formed a government coalition, supporting two different candidates, respectively, Kurt Steyrer and Otto Scrinzi. Nevertheless, in order to determine whether the candidates

endorsed by government parties in a particular presidential election tend to be punished in comparison to the scores obtained by those parties in the preceding legislative election, we can compare the combined share of the vote obtained by Steyrer and Scrinzi (44.9 percent) with the combined scores of SPÖ and FPÖ in the April 1983 legislative elections (47.6 percent).

There are, however, situations in which the very concept of “government candidates” is put into question by the fact that parties in both government *and* the opposition support the same candidates. We can illustrate the problem with the help of the Portuguese case. In the 1991 presidential elections, the centre-right Social Democratic Party (PSD), by then controlling a single-party majority in parliament, endorsed the re-election of the incumbent, Mário Soares. However, it was joined in that endorsement by the opposition’s centre-left Socialist Party (PS). In this case, the direct comparison between the share of vote obtained in the preceding legislative election by the parties in government (50.2 percent, in the 1987 elections) and that obtained in the 1991 presidential election by the “government-endorsed candidate” (70.4 percent) makes little sense, since, in that case, we would not be taking into account the fact that PS was also endorsing the government’s candidate.

In order to solve this potential measurement problem while preserving the ability to validly compare election results in all these varied situations, the following general rule was adopted: we compare the shares of the valid vote obtained by *all candidates endorsed by government parties* in each presidential election with the shares of the valid vote obtained in the previous legislative election by *all parties that endorsed those*

candidates.¹⁰ Thus, going back to the Portuguese 1991 example, Soares was the only presidential candidate endorsed by a party in government (the PSD), obtaining, as we saw previously, 70.4 percent of the vote. However, since he was endorsed by two parties, one in government and another in the opposition (PS), we must compare the share of the vote Soares obtained in 1991 with the share of the vote obtained in 1987 by the two parties that endorsed him, i.e., the PSD *and* the PS (74.1 percent).

The level of government gains in presidential elections, our dependent variable, is assessed by calculating the difference between the valid vote obtained by government-endorsed candidates and the valid vote obtained by all parties that supported them in the preceding legislative election (*Government Gain*). We obtained information about which candidates were supported by government parties (and the remaining parties that endorsed them) from *Keesing's Record of World Events*,¹¹ while the necessary electoral scores were obtained from a variety of sources for all but one of our cases.¹² However, since we are testing whether presidential elections are used to punish government parties, we only included in our sample elections where *any* of parties in government endorsed

¹⁰ In two-round legislative or presidential elections, first-round vote shares were used.

¹¹ For the cases of Austria, Finland, and Iceland, such information was complemented with other sources: Müller (1999), Paloheimo (2001) and Kristinsson (1999).

¹² The main sources for electoral results were Mackie and Rose (1991 and 1997). Additional sources and crosschecking of data were obtained from the *African Elections Database* (<http://africanelections.tripod.com/>), the International Foundation for Election Systems' *Election Guide* database (<http://www.electionguide.org/>), the *Political Database of the Americas* (<http://www.georgetown.edu/pdb>), the election results' database of the *Project on Political Transformation and the Electoral Process in Post-Communist Europe* (<http://www2.essex.ac.uk/elect/database/election.asp>) and *Parties and Elections in Europe* database (<http://www.parties-and-elections.de/>). Ultimately, only for the Mongolian 2000 legislative elections did we fail to obtain the share of the vote obtained by the different parties.

any presidential candidate, which led to the exclusion of yet another case.¹³ And for the same reason, vote shares in each presidential election are always compared with those in the *preceding* legislative election, i.e., the election on the basis of which the incumbent government at the time of the presidential election was formed. We were left therefore with 68 presidential elections (in semi-presidential democratic systems, preceded by legislative elections, and where government parties endorsed at least a candidate).

2.3 Government gains and losses: hypotheses and results

The main prediction that derived from assuming lower salience for presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies is that the parties in government should — through the presidential candidates they support — experience electoral losses in relation to the score they obtained in the preceding legislative elections. However, the second-order model makes specific predictions about the relationship between the timing of elections and the size of those losses. Since one of their major source is the expression of discontent on the part of voters, such losses are unlikely to occur indiscriminately through time. Instead, their magnitude (and whether they take place at all) should depend upon the popularity of governments, which, in turn, seems to follow a cyclical pattern: highest immediately after the elections, lowest at midterm, and recovering again towards the end of the cycle. This is, in fact, what most of the abundant literature on European elections has generally found: that the magnitude of government losses in relation to the preceding legislative elections tends to follow a curvilinear pattern (Marsh, 1998; Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004; Schmitt, 2005).

¹³ This was the case in the 2003 presidential elections in Iceland.

Whether a second-order cyclical pattern of government losses in presidential elections is indeed present is also likely to be contingent upon at least two systemic factors. First, the actual powers bestowed on the presidency. The notion that sincere supporters of government parties feel free to use those elections in order to send a message of dissatisfaction rests on the assumption that they perceive little real political power to be at stake in the presidential office. However, as we saw in the previous section, that assumption may be untenable in several semi-presidential regimes, especially those where greater powers are indeed bestowed on the presidency and where presidential elections seem to be no less salient and mobilizing than legislative elections. Therefore, we should expect a cyclical pattern of government losses to be visible in those semi-presidential regimes with weaker presidents, but not necessarily in those whose presidents have at least some amount of influence in policy-making, agenda-setting, or cabinet composition and survival.

Second, cyclical patterns of government losses may also be contingent upon the level of party system institutionalization in each country. In a recent analysis of the 2004 European Parliament election results, Schmitt attributes the absence of such patterns in the new post-communist EU countries (in contrast with the remaining cases) to the instability of their party systems and the lack of stable party alignments among voters. The result is that changes in aggregate electoral results from one election to the other, rather than stemming mainly from vote switches predictable on the basis of the second-order model, are also the result of volatile voters' preferences in relation to an unstable supply of party choices (Schmitt, 2005: 666-668). Similarly, Mainwaring has shown that unstable party organizations and labels as well as citizens' weak attachments to existing

parties tend to be associated with high levels of electoral instability and unpredictability, besides allowing the successful emergence of apartisan presidential candidates, using personalistic (and sometimes populist) appeals (Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mainwaring 1999; Mainwaring and Torcal 2005). In sum, the notion that certain parties might be systematically punished or rewarded in less salient elections on the basis of their size and government status assumes that the available options in each election are inherently connected by similar and stable party labels and by the transposition to second-order elections of first-order platforms and positions. Thus, we hypothesize that second-order patterns are less likely to emerge in democracies with lower levels of party system institutionalization. As Mainwaring and Torcal suggest, the crucial distinction in this respect is likely to be the one between earlier “early” (“first” and “second wave”) and “late democratizers” (“third wave” democracies), a function of the latter’s particular historical and socio-political developmental sequence, such as creation of new democratic party systems after the emergence of modern mass media, particularly television, as the main channels of political intermediation, or the less central role of parties in the expansion of citizenship (Mainwaring and Torcal, 2005: 209).

Figure 2 about here

Figure 2 presents the average government gains from legislative to presidential elections per country, first for the early democratizers (first and second wave democracies) and then for the late democratizers (third wave democracies), with the

number of presidential elections considered in each country in parenthesis.¹⁴ One can immediately see that although government losses — in terms of vote share for government-endorsed presidential candidates in comparison with that obtained in the preceding legislative elections by the parties that endorsed them — seem to be the norm for a majority of countries, this is much more the case for *third wave* democracies rather than for early democratizers, quite unlike we had hypothesized.

It could be the case, nonetheless, that such unexpected contrast is actually obscuring fundamental variations between countries and concrete elections according to the levels of presidential powers or the timing of elections in relation to the first-order cycle. This hypothesis is tested in table 4, which shows the results of the regression of government gains in presidential elections on a series of variables. First, following Anderson and Ward (1996) in their study of “barometer elections”, we include in the model a measure of government performance in the previous election: *Government Parties’ Vote in Legislative Elections*. This is the absolute share of the vote obtained in legislative elections by the parties endorsing the government’s presidential candidates. Although Anderson and Ward advance a similar variable in order to test the “surge and decline” hypothesis (1996), it should probably be more appropriately seen as a test of a more generic “regression to the mean” hypothesis (Campbell, 1985; Oppenheimer et al., 1986): the larger the share of the vote obtained by a party or a coalition in a given election, the more likely it becomes that it experiences losses in relation to the previous score in a subsequent election. We thus expect a negative sign for the coefficient associated with this variable.

¹⁴ ‘Third wave’ democracies in our sample are Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Croatia, Lithuania, Mongolia, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Slovakia, Slovenia and Taiwan.

Conversely, we test the “surge and decline” hypothesis by adding *Turnout Change* to the model. To the extent government losses result, in part, from the demobilization of “peripheral voters” who previously voted for the advantaged party, we should find that government losses should be larger as drops in turnout from legislative to presidential elections increase. In other words, on the basis of the surge and decline approach, we expect *Turnout Change* (both from legislative to presidential elections) to have positive impact on *Government Gains*, particularly in the cases of weaker presidencies (where, as we have seen, the “low-stimulus” assumption is more tenable).

The presence of the cyclical pattern of government losses predicted by the second-order model is then assessed by evaluating whether the relative performance of government parties in presidential elections results from a quadratic function of the proportion of the legislative term elapsed since first-order elections. Thus, we add the variables *Cycle* and *Cycle*² to the model, with *Cycle* measured as the proportion of the legislative term elapsed at the time the presidential election took place, ranging, in our sample, from .1 to 1, measured always in relation to the latest constitutionally prescribed possible election date after each legislative election.

Finally, since we expect that cyclical pattern of government losses to be present only in semi-presidential regimes with weak presidents, we test our model both for the entire sample and for two sub-samples of cases, those in the bottom- and in the upper-halves of our 8-point *Presidential Powers Index*. And taking into account the possibility of different patterns in early and late democratizers, we also ran an alternative specification of the model, using interaction terms for *Cycle* and *Cycle*² with dummies for “*First and Second Wave*” and “*Third Wave*” democracies.

Table 4 about here

As table 4 shows, *Government Parties' Vote in Legislative Elections* has the predicted negative sign in all models, reaching statistical significance in the model including interaction terms as applied to the full sample. Conversely, there is no evidence of a “surge and decline” effect, as *Turnout Change* is far from statistical significance in all models. However, two additional things are revealed by the results in Table 4. First, the inadequacy of the model specification that does not take into account how cycle effects may vary according to whether regimes are early or late democratizers: in either the full sample or any of the sub-samples, the models lacking the interaction terms always provide a worse fit to the data. Second, that the only case where the cycle variables are significant and have the predicted signs is, as hypothesized, that applied to the subset of semi-presidential regimes with weaker presidents.

However, contrary to initial expectations (but along the line of what figure 2 already suggested), it is the interaction terms with the *Third Wave* dummy (rather than with *First and Second Waves*) that emerge as statistically significant. Third wave democracies display pattern of government candidates' performances gradually worsening in comparison with the legislative elections' score obtained by the parties that endorsed them, only to recover (after the lowest point at about .6 of the cycle) up to the end of term. For example, when the variables measuring government parties' electoral performance in the legislative election and turnout change are set at the sub-sample's mean value and *Third Wave* is set at 1 (and *First and Second Waves*, obviously, at 0), we

observe, early in the cycle (.10), a predicted gain for government-endorsed presidential candidates of just -3.5 percentage points, meaning that government-endorsed candidates experience a loss of 3.5 points in relation to the share of the vote obtained, in the preceding legislative election, by the parties that endorsed them. However, this loss increases to 18.7 points at about the midterm, only to decrease again to a loss of 7 points at the very end of the legislative election cycle (*Cycle* at 1). In contrast, the interaction terms with *First and Second Wave* remain far from statistical significance in all models and sub-sets of cases.

How to interpret these findings? On the one hand, support for the notion that the relative performance of government-endorsed candidates in any set of countries conforms to the expectations of second-order theories is less than overwhelming. Although cyclical effects are found among the set of semi-presidential regimes with weaker presidents (as expected), they are, more unexpectedly, found among *late* (rather than early) democratizers, and the overall fit of the model is poor. Besides, it could be argued that our measurement of the relative performance of government-endorsed candidates might tend to underestimate government losses and thus obscure cyclical effects, since our sample of presidential elections contains several cases where government-endorsed presidential candidates were also endorsed by opposition parties, something that, from the point of view the second-order theories, would potentially mitigate the extent to which voters are able and willing to punish government parties in presidential elections.¹⁵

¹⁵ Among our sample of presidential elections, there are 12 of such cases: Austria in the 1980 and 1998 presidential elections, Finland in 1968 and 1978, France in 1969 and 1974, Iceland in 1988, Portugal in 1976, 1986 and 1996, and Romania in 2000.

However, we reran the analyses excluding such cases from the sample and all sub-samples and found no improvements on the fit of any of the models.

On the other hand, however, there are several reasons why we should not be extremely surprised by these results. In one of the rare existing studies of presidential elections in an established semi-presidential democracy using individual-level data — the Irish 1997 elections — van der Brug and his colleagues also found that the largely symbolic nature of the presidential office and the predictable spill-over of themes and cues from the first-order arena were not enough to guarantee strong links between candidate and party preferences in presidential elections. Ultimately, “neither power, nor sending a message to the first-order arena seems to have been at stake” (van der Brug et al. 2000: p. 648). Instead, in the Irish presidential elections, voters seem to have used cues other than party identification or the relationship of candidates with government parties for their voting decisions, turning these elections into “popularity contest in which voters express what kind of person they want as they head of state” and where “voters’ preferences for presidential candidates (...) [are] largely unconnected to their political opinions” (van der Brug et al., 2000: p 635).

The cases of Austria and Iceland — the other established semi-presidential democracies with presidential powers in the bottom-half of our scale — also seem to follow a similar pattern, through which the partisan links of presidential candidates are of limited and, perhaps, declining importance. As Müller notes, “the personalities of the candidates have always been important and since the 1970s the relevance of this factor has considerably increased”, as parties tend to endorse “elder statesman” (rather than party leaders) and the candidates make a conscious effort to display partisan neutrality

both during the campaign and, when victorious, while in office (Müller, 1999: 42-44). Similarly, in Iceland, although candidates' partisan provenance is, in most cases, identifiable, "the president is a political outsider in the sense that he is chosen on personal rather than on political grounds", to the point where parties themselves have actually abdicated, since 1952, from making formal endorsements to candidates (Kristinsson, 1999: 100). Thus, from this point of view, the absence of second-order cyclical patterns of government punishment in the Irish, Austrian or Icelandic cases might come as less of a surprise.

Conversely, one of the interesting features characterizing most of the "third wave" semi-presidential democracies has been the fact that, even when the powers bestowed on the presidency are relatively scarce — like in most of the Eastern European cases and post-1982 Portugal — this has not prevented the high public and political prominence of the relationship between the presidential candidates, the presidential office, and the existing party system. Voters in these countries have certainly not lacked informational shortcuts allowing them to connect presidential races with party politics, especially considering that candidates have often performed previous roles as high-level party officials, members or speakers of parliament and, in large number of cases, as party leaders or even prime ministers. Purvanov in Bulgaria, Mesic in Croatia, Paksas in Lithuania, Kwasniewski in Poland, Sampaio and Soares in Portugal, Iliescu, Constantinescu, and Basescu in Romania, Schuster and Gasparovic in Slovakia, and Drnovsek in Slovenia are just some of the most prominent of these cases. Besides, third-wave semi-presidential democracies have also been characterized by frequent periods of cohabitation, with conflicts between the presidency and the executive over a variety of

policy and institutional issues becoming a central part of the political agenda (Frain, 1995; Baylis, 1996; Protsyk, 2005). Therefore, in these countries, lower levels of party system institutionalization may have been compensated by greater levels of public visibility and partisan engagement in presidential elections fought along the familiar lines of first-order elections, allowing voters to use clearer partisan cues in their presidential voting decisions, justifying the apparently surprising fact that, after all, it is only among third-wave democracies that we are able to find the most persuasive evident of a cyclical pattern of government losses. We will return to this issue in the final section of the article.

3. Alternative approaches to government's electoral performance in presidential elections

As we have just seen, the notions that the election of a non-executive head of state should result in losses for government, and that such losses should be higher at midterm, receives only qualified support from the available data, limited, as predicted, to regimes with weaker presidents and, more unexpectedly, to third-wave democracies. However, at least from the point of view of the value of the vote for the electorate and its reflection on aggregate turnout, there are several semi-presidential democracies where the fundamental assumptions of the either the “surge and decline” or “second-order” approaches seem now less tenable. In fact, it would be surprising if citizens perceived the selection of presidents as a minor affair in countries where those presidents enjoy some discretion in dismissing governments or even calling new elections, and may even share responsibility with the executive in some domains of policy-making, such as foreign policy. And in those cases, as we have seen, there is little evidence of the lower turnout levels or the

kind of government losses hypothesized by the theories that assume presidential elections to have lower salience for voters. Therefore, we must turn our attention to explanations of the different performance of government parties in legislative and presidential elections where the assumption of lower salience does not play a crucial role.

As Marsh (2000) recalls, most of theories that have tried to account for electoral changes across different types of elections — including second-order theories themselves — have their roots in the observation of electoral patterns in US midterm elections, and there is no reason why we should not contemplate their further applicability to the explanation of a comparable phenomenon. One of the major theoretical approaches to changes in the electoral performance of the presidential party in midterm Congressional elections is that the latter can be simply conceived of as referenda on the performance of government, whose perception by the voters can be ascertained on the basis of popularity data and, indirectly, economic indicators (Tufte, 1975; 1978). This notion has several points of contact with the second-order model, but contrary to it, makes no assumptions about the lack of salience of non-general elections, voters' willingness to take advantage of them to punish incumbents, any systematic tendency towards government losses, or even about the midterm being the particular point in the electoral cycle where losses are greater. Instead, if losses do tend be greater at midterm, it is just assumed that occurs just because the executive's popularity does seem to decline throughout the term in office and the economy to improve at the time of general elections. However, as Marsh notes, "to the extent that neither is the case, the president's party should not suffer midterm losses" (Marsh, 2000).

There is already a relevant body research suggesting that presidential election results in semi-presidential democracies may be affected by economic factors. Most of that research, however, has been made in (or has been theoretically inspired by) the French case. Under unified government — when the French President and Prime Minister belong to the same party coalition — the score obtained by presidential officeholders (or candidates endorsed by the government's party) seems to be largely explained by GDP growth (Lewis-Beck, 1997; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000). Conversely, under cohabitation — when the President and the Prime Minister belong to different party coalitions — economic liabilities or assets accrue to the presidential candidates endorsed by the parties controlling the assembly and the cabinet (Lewis-Beck, 1997; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau, 2000).¹⁶ However, the common feature of both the “unified government” and “cohabitation” situations is that the candidates endorsed by the party coalition controlling the assembly and supporting the executive — the President or the president's party candidates, under unified government, or the candidates endorsed by the government, under cohabitation — are held accountable for economic performance. Thus, since our dependent variable measures change in the performance of the party or parties controlling the government from legislative to presidential elections — *Government Gain* — we expect greater economic growth to result generally in greater gains for the government in presidential elections (through the presidential candidates

¹⁶ In an unpublished paper, Samuels and Hellwig (2004) extend this argument to all semi-presidential regimes, where, according to their analysis, the incumbent president (or the candidate endorsed by incumbent president's party) is only held accountable for GDP growth in the specific situations of unified government, i.e., when the president and the prime minister belong to the same party.

they endorse). In order to test this hypothesis, we regress *Government Gain* on *Economy*, the percent real GDP growth.¹⁷

Another explanation of electoral change across different types of elections consists in a simple “presidential penalty” (or, in our case, “governmental penalty”) hypothesis: the notion that electorates tend penalize the party controlling the executive independently of the quality of governmental performance (Erikson, 1988). There are, however, different reasons why this penalty should be effected. Proponents of a “negative voting” hypothesis suggest that, because “negative stimuli are more instrumental to vote choice than positive”, the evaluation of incumbents in midterm elections suffers from a negativity bias, through which “citizens displeased with a president’s performance are more likely to vote against his party’s congressional candidates than are satisfied voters likely to vote for them”, with the result that incumbent losses are always more likely than gains (Kernell, 1977: 52; see also Lau, 1985; and Fiorina and Shepsle, 1989).

This hypothesis has already been tested outside the context of US midterm legislative elections. In a study of legislative elections held in ten presidential regimes, Shugart shows that, *ceteris paribus*, “over time, more voters become disillusioned and defect to the opposition”, with the result that “elections held early after a presidential election are likely to produce a surge in support for the new president, with a simple linear model fitting the data and predicting a decline over time in elections held later in the term” (Shugart, 1995: 337). We can readily adapt this hypothesis to the context of

¹⁷ If the presidential election was held until the end of June, we use percent GDP growth at year $t-1$ and, if after June, GDP growth at year t (presidential election year). Source for GDP growth data since 1960 was the World Bank’s *World Development Indicators Online* (<http://publications.worldbank.org/WDI/>). Before 1960, the source was Maddison (2003).

presidential elections in semi-presidential systems. If the relative performance of government parties is to be affected by a general negativity bias, we should observe that, in comparison with the score obtained in the elections on the basis of which executive power is formed (legislative elections, in the case of semi-presidential systems), government parties' performance in presidential elections should decline with the passage of time: keeping other things equal, the more time has passed since the legislative elections, the greater the punishment effected. We test this hypothesis by regressing *Government Gain* on *Years*, the time elapsed since the legislative elections took place (with the expectation of decreasing gains as more time elapses).

Penalties for the parties controlling the executive, however, can derive from a rather different source. "Balancing theories" also predict government losses in elections for non-executive offices, but do so on the basis of rather different assumptions about the behaviour of voters. They assume that ideologically moderate voters who care about policy outcomes should have a preference for split partisan control of the presidency and Congress, i.e, for creating a balance of power between the executive and the legislature, and, thus, promoting policy outcomes that are compromises between the positions of the different parties controlling each branch (Alesina and Rosenthal, 1989; Fiorina, 1992; Scheve and Tomz, 1999).

We adapt this hypothesis to presidential elections in semi-presidential regimes by ascertaining whether gains or losses by the government's parties in those elections are affected by whether government and the legislature are controlled by a single-party majority. As Shugart remarks, "the argument in favour of moderation between two relatively extreme parties appears to work only in systems in which majorities for one or

another party are regularly expected” (Shugart, 1995: 329). But unlike what occurs in the U.S., where elections for the executive office result in its control by a clearly identifiable partisan incumbent, such majorities cannot be regularly expected as a result of legislative elections in parliamentary or semi-presidential systems, which also produce regularly alternative solutions, ranging from minority cabinets to those supported by oversized coalitions. Therefore, “balancing behavior” can be expected mostly when there is something like an “incumbent *party*”, which has the command over executive power that is only provided by the support of an absolute majority in parliament. In other words, the incentives for balancing between legislative and presidential elections in semi-presidentialism should assume executives supported by cohesive single-party majorities. Thus, we expect governments to experience greater losses in presidential elections whenever they are supported by a party commanding an absolute majority in parliament, and add a dummy variable for *Absolute Single Party Majority*.

Finally, we add two control variables. The first measures whether any of the candidates endorsed by parties in government is herself the incumbent president — *Incumbent Government Candidate*, 1 if yes, 0 if no — in order to take into account great and well-known advantages in terms of garnering votes and even dissuading otherwise viable competitors (Jones, 1999; Samuels, 2004). The second is *Government Parties’ Vote in Legislative Elections*, in order to control for a “regression to the mean” effect.

Table 5 about here

Table 5 shows the results of a multivariate test of the previously advanced hypotheses. First, contrary to what occurred in the analysis made in the previous section — where theories assuming the lower salience of presidential elections were tested — the new model produces a better fit to the results for the set of semi-presidential democracies with *stronger* (rather than weaker) presidencies. Second, within this small sub-sample of presidential election results, all variables have the predicted sign: positive for *Economy* and *Incumbent Government Candidate*, and negative for *Years since Legislative Election*, *Absolute Single-Party Majority* and *Government's Vote in Legislative Elections*.

However, not all explanations of the relative performance of government-endorsed candidates perform equally well. Although both the coefficients on *Incumbent Government Candidate* and *Economy* fail to reach conventional levels of statistical significance, the former is much closer to that than the latter ($p=.11$). In other words, among the variables in the model, economic growth is the one that clearly does not produce relevant effects on government gains. Furthermore, besides the “regression to the mean effect” that we had already detected, two clearly significant trends emerge: a downward trend over time in the gains obtained by government parties in presidential elections, and a tendency for presidential candidates supported by parties enjoying single-party majorities in parliament to experience losses. In other words, these results constitute supportive evidence for a “governmental penalty” hypothesis among semi-presidential regimes with stronger presidents, a penalty that results both from an accumulation of negative perceptions about government performance over time and from voters' reaction to the potential concentration of the presidency, government and the legislature under control of a single-party.

4. Discussion

What kind of elections are presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies? The answers provided here to this question are inevitably tentative, the result of a first preliminary comparative exploration of aggregate electoral results in this type of political system. However, several conclusions can be advanced on the basis of the available data.

First, our results confirm that theories elaborated in the context of the US midterm or European parliament elections can be successfully applied to other contexts, in order to account for the same sort of phenomenon: changes from general elections to other types of elections. Crucial for this endeavour of generalization, however, seems to be proper attention to contextual and systemic variations. As our results show, the success of different theoretical approaches in accounting for such changes from legislative to presidential elections in semi-presidential democracies seems to be contingent upon variables such as the actual powers bestowed upon the presidency and whether countries are early or late democratizers. Particularly crucial in differentiating the applicable theoretical approaches seems to be the extent to which presidents hold relevant powers in what concerns appointing and dismissing government officials and other office-holders, calling new elections, or influence decision-making in important policy domains.

Theoretical approaches that assume the low salience of presidential elections tend, unsurprisingly, to fare better where presidential powers are more limited: lower levels of turnout in comparison with legislative elections are clearly more common where the presidency holds less powers, and the expected government losses at the middle of the first-order cycle seem to occur in these cases, at least, in “third wave” semi-presidential

democracies. Conversely, theoretical approaches where the assumptions of lower salience are not crucial tend to be better in explaining electoral change in countries where presidents indeed hold more considerable powers. In these cases, presidential elections tend to elicit higher levels of turnout, and the ability of government parties and coalitions to translate their previous support in legislative elections into support for their presidential candidates is affected by a “governmental penalty”. On the one hand, in regimes with stronger presidencies, support for government-endorsed candidates displays a linear decline as we progress along the first-order cycle: with the values of the remaining variables set at their mean values, the model predicts a gain of 5.4 percentage points for government candidates when presidential elections take place in the month after the legislative elections, but a loss of 9.6 percentage points after four years have elapsed. On the other hand, voters seem to be less inclined to support a presidential candidate endorsed by a party that already enjoys full control of cabinet and parliament. The results supporting the “balancing hypothesis” are particularly interesting, since previous research had found difficulties in garnering evidence about this sort of behaviour outside the United States, either in presidential (Shugart, 1995) or parliamentary and semi-presidential systems (Elgie, 2001). In any case, however, the universe of semi-presidential regimes seems to be too diverse for a definition of “semi-presidentialism” purely on the basis of “dispositional properties” (Elgie, 1998) to be politically consequential, at least in what concerns patterns of electoral change.

The main negative finding of our analyses is also instructive. There is no evidence of the use by voters of presidential elections in semi-presidentialism as an opportunity to judge the government’s economic performance. It may be the case that the hypothesis

that GDP growth should have an impact on government parties' gains from legislative to presidential elections is in an excessive oversimplification of the way economic performance may serve as a cue for voters in electoral contests to elect a president. However, this negative finding also has its rather plausible explanations. In fact, research on presidential elections in *presidential* systems had already revealed that, when those elections are not concurrent with legislative elections, economic performance produces no impact on the vote swing for the candidate of the president's party, since non-concurrence allows candidates to decouple the campaign from national policy issues and concentrates voters' attentions on the personal qualities of candidates rather than government's performance (Samuels, 2004).

This is even more likely in semi-presidentialism, where the assignment of responsibilities for government performance to presidents is potentially much less clear than in presidentialism. It is true that, in the case of France, votes for or against the government-endorsed candidates in presidential elections do seem to serve as opportunities to pass judgement either on those who have been the *de facto* all-powerful heads of the executive (following unified government) or on those who aspire to become such figures (following cohabitation). However, as Duverger himself noted in his seminal article about semi-presidentialism, France, with its "supreme heads of the executive and real heads of the government" (at least under unified government), stands as an aberrant case of a president who "exercises in practice much stronger powers than his counterparts", in comparison with other semi-presidential regimes where, in spite of significant constitutional powers, presidents and governments coexist in a shifting but still relatively balanced dualism (Duverger, 1980: 180). Thus, the lack of effects of

economic performance on the government's electoral performance in presidential elections, even among the set of semi-presidential democracies with the most powerful presidents, is also suggestive of the dangers of making generalizations about semi-presidentialism on the basis of the highly exceptional French experience.

These results also have implications for the prospects of cohabitation in semi-presidential democracies. In both semi-presidential and presidential regimes (Shugart, 1995: 315), unified government has been the almost invariable result of concurrent elections.¹⁸ However, at least within semi-presidential regimes with stronger presidents, there seems to exist a tendency towards the rejection of a particular kind of unified government. Note that this does not mean that voters are, in general, particularly reluctant to vote for presidential candidates endorsed by a party coalition in government. In fact, when those candidates are themselves the incumbents, voters tend to reward rather than punish them. And recent studies using individual-level data suggest that, although voters do engage in electorally consequential considerations about what kind of partisan

¹⁸ This was the case with the November 1996 and 2000 elections in Romania (the former resulting in victories for the Democratic Convention of Romania and for its presidential candidate, Emil Constantinescu, and the latter resulting in victories for the Social Democratic Party and Ion Iliescu), the Taiwanese 1996 elections (with the Kuomintang and Lee Teng-hui emerging as, respectively, the most voted party and candidate), the Peruvian 1980 and 1985 elections (with the triumph of Popular Action and Belaúnde Terry in the former, and of APRA and García Pérez in the latter). Similarly, in the Romanian 2004 elections, Adrien Nastase (supported by the Social Democratic and Humanist parties) emerged as the most voted candidate in the first round, while the coalition supporting him also topped the list of parties in the legislative elections. Curiously, although Nastase ultimately lost the second-round of the presidential elections to the Traian Basescu, who was endorsed by the 'Justice and Truth' Alliance (DA), this did not lead to divided government, since the coalition formed in December of 2004 was ultimately led by DA. In fact, the only case of concurrent elections in semi-presidential democracies not leading to unified government is the 1992 Slovenian case, where the victory of the Liberal Democratic Party in the legislative elections was accompanied by the landslide triumph of Milan Kucan, who anyway ran as an independent candidate.

distribution of political offices they prefer, those considerations may be neither determined by a wish to promote policy moderation nor necessarily in favour of cohabitation. As Gschwend and Leuffen (2005) show in their study of the French 2002 legislative elections, although voters who were less anchored in partisan and ideological terms did vote on the basis of their “regime preferences” — preferences for premier-presidential cohabitation or compatibility — a large (and, throughout the campaign, increasing) part of those voters actually preferred the latter. However, our results point to the need to investigate voters’ reactions to the prospect of a particular kind of unified government: where the assembly, the cabinet, and the presidency might fall under the control not of a *coalition* of parties, but of a *single party*. Under that prospect, our results suggest, government-endorsed candidates do tend to experience important losses.

Finally, the election of weak presidents in semi-presidential regimes remains somewhat of a mystery in what concerns what those elections might really be about. When the partisan affiliation of the president is of little consequence to the composition of governments, the survival of legislatures, or policy-making agendas and outcomes, presidential elections could conceivably conform better to the second-order model in terms of their lack of salience and, thus, government punishment. And yet, at least in the older established democracies, they do not. We would like to suggest this may be a function of political learning under conditions of a stabilized and consolidated democracy. As the experience with the functioning of a semi-presidential regime with a largely ceremonial president accrues, the political conflictuality around her identity and role is likely to diminish, and politicians and voters’ perceptions of the exceptionally low stakes involved in the presidential election become stabilized. While voters might still be

conceivably interested to take advantage of presidential elections as a signalling device, they may also find that their options have been dramatically narrowed by the way political supply has, meanwhile, been restructured by politicians, by the adoption of crosscutting appeals on the part of presidential candidates, their recruitment outside the party system, and the formation of large coalitions encompassing both government and opposition parties around particular candidates, especially if they are uncontroversial (because largely ceremonial and powerless) incumbent heads of state seeking re-election.

In fact, presidential contests such as the already mentioned 1997 Irish elections (with no candidate having ever occupied a high party office and only one of them a practicing politician at all), the 1998 elections in Iceland (with Vigdís Finnbogadóttir receiving the tacit support of almost all parties and a staggering 94.6 percent of the vote when challenged by a single candidate of the Humanist Party), or the Austrian 1980 elections (with the SPÖ in government *and* the main party in the opposition — ÖVP — joining to endorse the uncontroversial re-election of Rudolf Kirchschläger) seem to be far more common in the established (weak) semi-presidential regimes than those in the recently consolidated democracies. Thus, either because the links between presidential candidates and the party system are made more diffuse or because grand coalitions around presidential candidates muddle the options of those who wish to express discontent with government performance, government punishment may have become more difficult to express for voters in presidential elections in the established semi-presidential democracies. These cases tend to become, then, a sort of “third-order” elections, where voters are left with little else to judge than the personal qualities of

candidates or, at most, their positions on a multiplicity of issues with different salience for different voters (van der Brug et al., 2000: 646-647).

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Table 1

Presidential and legislative elections in semi-presidential democracies (1945-2005)

Countries	Legislative elections		Presidential elections	
	First-last (N)	Average turnout (%)	First-last (N)	Average-turnout (%)
Austria (1945-)	1946-2002 (18)	90.7	1951-2004 (11)	89.1
Bulgaria (1991-)	1991-2005 (5)	68.1	1992-2001 (3)	60.0
Cape Verde (1992-)	1995-2001 (2)	63.7	2001 (1)	51.6
Croatia (2000-)	2000-2003 (2)	69.2	2000-2005 (2)	55.8
Finland (1945-)	1945-2003 (17)	75.6	1950-2000 (9)	74.0
France (1962-)	1962-2002 (11)	72.7	1965-2002 (7)	80.6
Iceland (1945-)	1946-2002 (17)	89.3	1952-2004 (6)	81.0
Ireland (1945-)	1944-2002 (17)	72.6	1945-1997 (6)	57.1
Lithuania (1992-)	1992-2004 (4)	58.2	1993-2004 (4)	63.0
Mali (1992-)	2002 (1)	26.0	2002 (1)	38.6
Mongolia (1992-)	1992-2004 (4)	87.2	1993-2005 (4)	83.7
Peru (1979-1992)	1980-1985 (2)	80.5	1980-1985 (2)	86.5
Poland (1992-)	1993-2005 (4)	46.7	1995-2005 (3)	59.7
Portugal (1976-)	1976-2005 (11)	73.2	1976-2001 (6)	68.9
Romania (1996-)	1996-2004 (3)	66.6	1996-2004 (3)	66.6
São Tomé and Príncipe (1990-)	1991-2002 (4)	65.0	1996-2001 (2)	74.0
Slovakia (1999-)	2002 (1)	70.1	1999-2004 (2)	60.9
Slovenia (1991-)	1992-2004 (4)	72.7	1992-2002 (3)	75.6
Taiwan (1994-)	1996-2004 (4)	67.4	1996-2004 (3)	79.7

Figure 1

Average difference between turnout in presidential and legislative elections

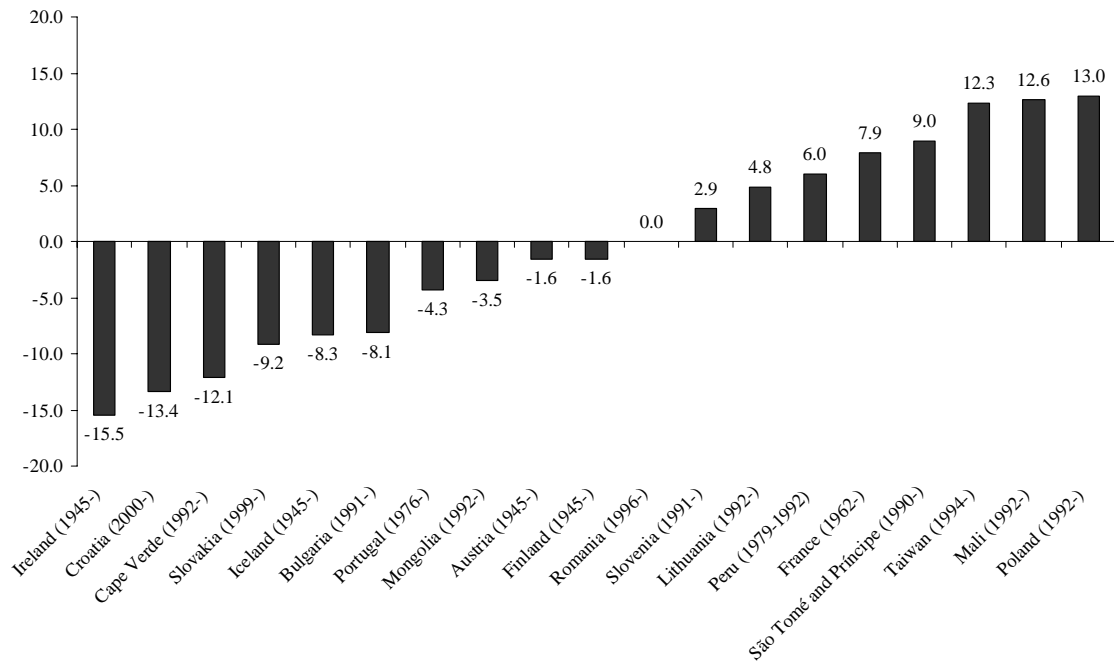


Table 3

The impact of presidential powers in presidential-legislative turnout difference (OLS estimates)

	Full sample (Model 1)	Excluding concurrent elections (Model 2)
Constant	4.67 (8.58)	5.11 (9.25)
Presidential powers index	1.57*** (.58)	1.44** (.65)
Incumbent running	-1.08 (2.27)	-1.51 (2.49)
Years since legislative election	1.27 (1.08)	1.96 (1.25)
Turnout in preceding legislative election	-.16 (.10)	-.18 (.11)
R^2	.22	.23
F ratio	4.71***	4.59***
N	74	67

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Standard errors in parenthesis

Figure 2
Average government gains in presidential elections

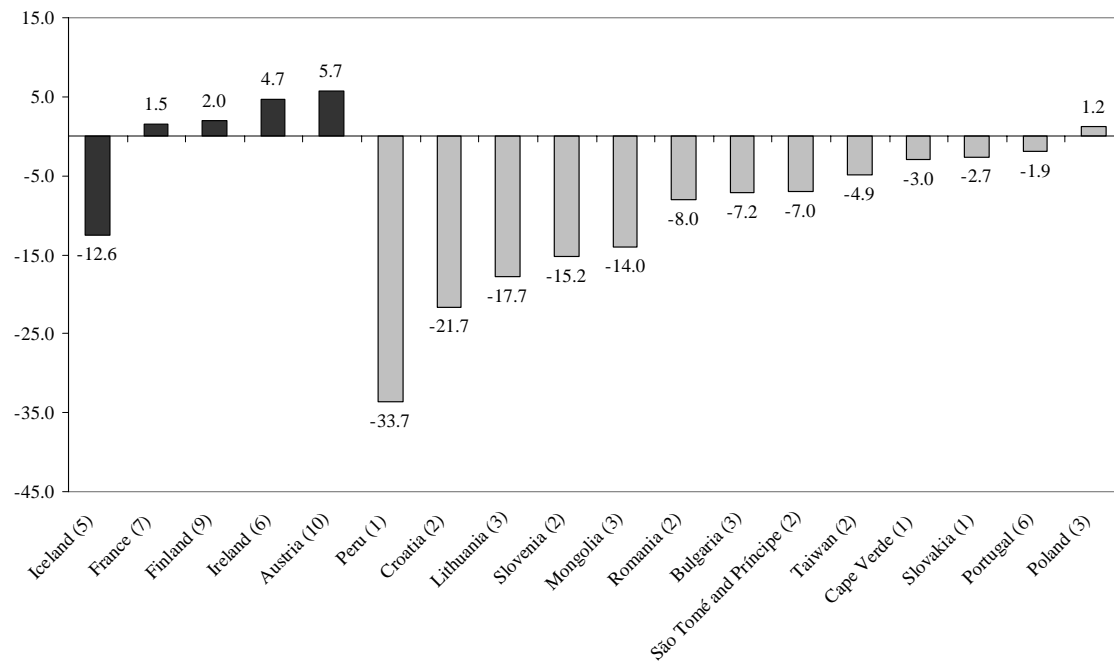


Table 4

Government gains in presidential elections: regression to the mean, surge and decline, and second-order cyclical effects (OLS estimates)

	Full sample		Presidential powers index<4		Presidential powers index>3	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Constant	3.35 (6.84)	7.17 (7.22)	1.20 (8.93)	9.08 (9.10)	11.54 (13.38)	.12 (14.02)
Government Parties' Vote in Legislative Elections	-.11 (.10)	-.19* (.10)	-.02 (.13)	-.12 (-.13)	-.36 (.23)	-.21 (.22)
Turnout change	.03 (.17)	.07 (.16)	-.16 (.26)	-.19 (.24)	-.12 (.36)	.24 (.36)
Cycle	6.67 (22.24)		-22.46 (31.28)		45.44 (30.61)	
Cycle ²	-15.06 (22.24)		14.70 (31.82)		-54.56 (29.28)	
First and second waves		5.93 (9.29)		-7.81 (13.69)		20.42 (14.39)
First and second waves *Cycle		6.20 (38.04)		35.69 (68.17)		-18.73 (51.19)
Third wave*Cycle		-30.10 (26.52)		-.78.89** (36.35)		31.92 (39.25)
First and second waves *Cycle ²		-14.57 (38.63)		-43.31 (81.50)		4.57 (46.32)
Third wave * Cycle ²		19.38 (26.26)		68.25* (35.39)		-53.10 (38.87)
<i>R</i> ²	.04	.22	.04	.25	.27	.51
<i>F</i> ratio	.69	2.41**	.39	1.63	1.82	2.52*
<i>N</i>	68	68	43	43	25	25

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Table 5

Economic voting, negative voting and balancing in presidential elections in semi-presidential systems (OLS estimates)

	Full sample	Presidential powers index<4	Presidential powers index>3
	(Model 1)	(Model 2)	(Model 3)
Constant	5.43 (6.34)	-.46 (8.30)	23.88* (12.79)
Economy	-.03 (.37)	-.15 (.48)	.22 (1.05)
Years since Legislative Election	-1.78 (1.49)	-1.56 (2.40)	-3.83* (1.86)
Absolute Single-Party Majority	-4.01 (4.77)	-1.86 (6.93)	-13.12* (7.53)
Incumbent Government Candidate	6.84* (3.75)	4.84 (5.38)	8.74 (5.25)
Government Parties' Vote in Legislative Elections	-.14 (.10)	-.04 (.14)	-.39** (.18)
R^2	.09	.04	.42
F ratio	1.28	.34	2.70*
N	68	43	25

* $p < 0.10$; ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.01$

Standard errors in parenthesis