

Presidential System vs. Parliamentary System

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Abstract

Presidential-versus-parliamentary-government is one of the cornerstone political science debates and provides essential evidence to comprehend the operation of states within democratic governmental systems. Presidential in the American example, and parliamentary through British government are fundamentally dissimilar in conception and form regarding handling how a country distributes power in both the legislature and executive branches of authority. The presidential model clearly divides powers, with the directly elected president serving as head of state and government, shielded from legislative action by only extraordinary measures like impeachment. It also guarantees stability and strong leadership but is prone to risk gridlock and two-party dominance at the expense of smaller political voices. Conversely, the parliamentary system fuses executive and legislature, with the government headed by a prime minister whose position depends on legislative confidence, favoring flexibility as well as coalition government.

Turkey's transition from parliamentary to presidential governance in 2018, instigated by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, provides a fertile case study with which to explore these compromises. Following a referendum in 2017, this constitutional transformation ended decades of parliamentary government defined by government uncertainty and coalition risk, replacing it with a regime of centralized execution. This was intended to improve stability and efficacy but has been the focus of debate over its democratic consequences. Since nations are grappling with the challenge of governance in a progressively more complicated global environment, understanding the impact of such an occurrence—swinging the pendulum between stability and democratic decline—is required. This analysis explores the theoretical underpinning of each system, specifics of Turkey's 2018 change, and the impact that followed its democratic process, offering an objective verdict of a turning political experience.

Presidential System:

A presidential system is one in which the president, like in the United States, serves both as head state and head of government and gets elected separately from the legislature for a predetermined amount of time. This is a system of organized separation of powers, where there is an executive and legislative branch that operates in distinct roles and limited capacity to remove each other from office except by extraordinary means (e.g., impeachment). Supporters argue that this separation guarantees stability and allows the president to act decisively, free from constant legislative pressure. But its critics say that it can lead to gridlock, especially where the executive and legislature are controlled by different parties, and can result in a two-party system that disenfranchises small parties.

Parliamentary System:

A parliamentary system, on the other hand, as exists in the United Kingdom or India, combines the executive and legislative functions. The government is led by someone who is delegated from the legislature and must maintain its confidence if they are to continue in their position. The head of state (monarch or figurehead president, etc.) is at least symbolic to some extent. This is a flexible system whereby governments can be dissolved or changed by votes of no confidence and typically has coalition governments involved that can include an assortment of interests. But this flexibility also creates instability, as constant elections or fragile coalitions can destabilize government.

Both models have their compromise. Presidential models may offer predictability with fixed terms but may be vulnerable to polarization and inefficiency, while parliamentary models maximize accountability and flexibility but may lead to instability, especially in polarized or divided political contexts.

The Shift in Turkey (2018):

Turkey transitioned from a parliamentary system to a presidential system, on July 9, 2018, which was followed by a referendum election that was held on April 17, 2017, was a grand constitutional overhaul under the leadership of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. . The parliamentary government that has ruled since 1923 was beset by political instability up to 2018, with 48 governments having been formed since 1950 and 17 coalition governments between 1961 and 2002. This instability was typically brought about by the inability to secure a parliamentary majority, which rendered governments fleeting and made snap elections necessary.

The 2018 reconfiguration abolished the prime minister's office, investing the presidency with executive powers. The innovation was designed by Erdoğan, the former prime minister, on the grounds that it would ensure political stability and good governance. The new system invests very expansive powers in the president to appoint ministers, make decrees, and dissolve parliament with limited checks by the judiciary and legislature.

Impact on Democracy:

The effect of this movement on Turkish democracy is controversial, and the evidence points to both positive and negative consequences:

Stability and Efficiency:

The presidential system is said by its supporters to have brought stability, ending the loop of coalition governments. With situations like the COVID-19 pandemic and earthquakes in 2023, the government's ability to act with speed was raised as a virtue. Economic and decision-making efficiency has been said to be improved, as a single executive is able to get policies through without parliamentary gridlock.

Centralization of Power:

Complainants are blaming the reform for undermining democratic values by concentrating power in the person of the president. Ousting the prime minister and reduced parliamentary powers have raised the specter of authoritarianism. Opposition parties such as the CHP have accused Erdoğan of manipulating the system to gain greater control, yet their own demands for a stronger parliamentary system with multiple vice presidents reflect indecision about returning to the old system. The argument that power too was concentrated in the hands of the prime minister under the parliamentary system is answered by the fact that the president now has fewer obligations to parliament.

Erosion of Checks and Balances:

Judicial independence has been breached, with charges of an increased executive influence over the appointment of judges. Such a breach of separation of powers, a basic pillar of democracy, has led some scholars to argue that the government of Turkey today is less of a pure democracy and more of a

hybrid regime. Freedom of expression and media pluralism have also faced tension, with critics silenced or prosecuted, to add to the worries.

Public Perception and Representation:

Though some reports suggest general public support for the presidential system, opposition and outside observers, such as those tracking democracy measures, record declining democratic quality. The system's structure, with the president being directly elected, can enhance legitimacy but also tends to enhance populist leadership at the expense of minority representation, a parliamentary coalition strength.

The establishment narrative seems to present the transition as having been a success for stability, particularly given the history of government problems in Turkey. But there is reason to be skeptical about this view. Stability gained could be at the cost of backsliding for democracy, because centralized authority lessens accountability and pluralism: two democratic norms. Instability in the parliament system did occur, but so too did greater representation through coalition, which has been largely discarded by the presidential system. The lack of robust evidence on long-term economic or social impacts after 2018 limits conclusive judgments, but the movement toward authoritarianism in Turkey aligns with worldwide trends more generally in which presidential systems, in the absence of robust checks, can enable concentration of power.

Lastly, Turkey's shift to a presidential system in 2018 has brought stability and efficacy but at the high cost of democratic checks and balances. Whether or not this bargain strengthens or weakens democracy is a question of how one balances stability with pluralism and accountability. The experience suggests that context, Turkish political culture and history of government, will determine the success of such a transition, something too frequently overlooked in comparative analysis prone to favoring one system over the other.

Conclusion:

The experience shows that success or failure of a presidential system hinges less on a supposed advantage of the presidential over the parliamentary systems than on the particular context—Turkey's unusual political culture and history of governance. While the story of consolidation glows with stability, the disintegration of pluralism and accountability is a reason to worry about the future health of democracy. Shortfall in full statistics for economic and social results after 2018 only makes certain judgments harder, but global trend towards authoritarianism under lopsided presidential systems is a sign. Whether or if trade-off supports or erodes democracy essentially depends on resolving stability over inclusiveness and openness. For Turkey, and for any nation contemplating such reforms, the lesson is clear: regardless of the system of government, it must be molded to its own culture and heritage, or else the pursuit of efficiency will come at the expense of the democratic ideals it is attempting to uphold.