

Measuring Presidential Power: A Review of Contemporary Methods

Oleg Zaznaev

Professor and Chair of Department of Political Science, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Russia
Email: political.science@mail.ru

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n14p569

Abstract

The article presents a critical review of the contemporary methods of measuring presidential power in political science. The author analyzes these methods, describing each and demonstrating their advantages and disadvantages. When discussing mistakes in the measurement of presidential powers, the author tries to remove some of the problems associated with the measurement. He modifies Krouwel's method based on measuring the presidential score and parliamentary score that allows us to "weigh" the presidential and parliamentary components of any form of government, whether presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential. The author codes ten variables. He suggests a method of measuring based on the calculation of the index of the form of government (IFG), which is calculated by subtracting the parliamentary score from the presidential score. A positive IFG indicates the attraction of a system to presidentialism, and negative its shift to parliamentarism. The index analysis of forms of government opens up opportunities to gain knowledge about the volume of presidential powers in different countries, to develop a typology of regimes, to determine the relationship between the form of government and the consolidation of democracy, and to track the dynamics of regimes.

Keywords: presidential power; measuring presidential power; quantitative methods; form of government; presidentialism

1. Introduction

A few years ago, it had never occurred to anyone to measure forms of government. However, in recent years, political scientists have widely adopted an index analysis of presidential power, and there are now several methods of measuring presidential power that allow to imagine numerically not only the power of actors, but also the nature of the form of government.

What is the significance of the measurement of presidential power?

In answering this, it is first necessary to gain knowledge about the volume of presidential powers in different countries, which allows us to compare the "strength" and "weakness" of the presidential and parliamentary authority. In particular, we can empirically confirm or refute the common idea of the super-strong power of the president ("super-presidentialism") in, for example, countries of the former Soviet Union (Zaznaev, 2014, p. 197) and Eastern and Central Europe. In addition, a quantitative method may help researchers to suggest options for political reform in these states.

Second, as M.S. Shugart and J. Carey (1992) convincingly showed by skilfully combining quantitative and qualitative research, measuring presidential power allows us to develop a comprehensive typology of regimes (pp. 158–160), and to draw clear boundaries between presidentialism, parliamentarism, semi-presidentialism, and other types.

Third, the index of presidential power opens up opportunities for further implementation of correlation, regression, and factor analysis. In particular, it makes is possible to determine the relationship between the form of government and the consolidation of democracy, i.e. to verify empirically J. Linz's (1990) hypothesis on the "perils" of presidentialism and assess the arguments of his opponents.

Fourth, measuring presidential power provides the ability to track the dynamics of regimes. Focusing on qualitative categories (presidentialism, parliamentarism, semi-presidentialism etc.) means it is extremely difficult to determine in which direction the regime moves. For example, there are difficulties in trying to determine how the form of government in Kyrgyzstan has changed following the "Tulip Revolution" in 2006–2007: Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev was semi-presidential, and after he was overthrown it has become semi-presidential once again. However, there is no doubt that the relationship between the president, government, and parliament has changed, which can be determined using quantitative methods.

2. Literature Review: Methods of Measuring Presidential Power

Shugart and Carey (1992) formulated the most authoritative method. To assess presidential powers, they used "a simple interval scoring method on each of several aspects in which systems with elected presidencies vary" (p. 148) and divided all powers into two groups – legislative and nonlegislative. Each power is assessed on a 4–3–2–1–0 scale, and then all scores are summed (pp. 148–166). The authors focused only on the formal presidential prerogatives, such as those included in the constitution, and did not consider the political practice and the real (not formal) frameworks of power. In my view, this is the defect in their method.

J. McGregor's (1994) method is clear and simple. He proposed a list comprising 43 presidential powers and divided them into three groups: a) symbolic, ceremonial, and procedural; b) appointive; and c) political. The index is based on the number of powers that each president possesses. Each full presidential power receives "1," but if a power is limited it is considered half a power for computational purposes. The basic score for a country's presidency is computed by adding up all of the powers (pp. 12–16). McGregor took into account the "weight" of different groups of powers: appointive powers are twice as important as symbolic, ceremonial, and procedural powers, and political powers are three times as important (p. 10). This is true because, for example, awarding decorations, titles, and honors are not tantamount to the appointment of a prime minister or proposing legislation.

J. Hellman (1996) coded the formal constitutional powers of the president depending on the type of regime: in presidential systems each exclusive presidential power received "1," a power with reservations "0.5," and not given "0"; in parliamentary systems with direct presidential elections "0.75," "0.35," and "0" respectively; and in parliamentary systems with indirect presidential elections "0.5," "0.25," and "0". She explained these differences in coding by the fact that in different institutional structures presidential powers have a different weight.

T. Frye's (1997) method involved dividing the formal powers of the presidency into two groups: the powers "owned" only by the president and those that he performed together with the parliament or the government (shared powers). If the president is elected in a general election, each exclusive power is assigned a value of "1," and each joint power receives "0.5." If not elected in this way, all powers receive "0.5." All of the numerical values are then summed (pp. 525–526).

A. Siaroff (2003) measured not only the formal but also the informal powers of the president, which thereby makes his method real. He offered a dichotomous indexing system ("1" – yes, "0" – no) and reduced the number of variables to nine (pp. 303–305). Noteworthy here is that two variables in his list (direct election of the president and simultaneous elections for president and legislature) characterize the form of government rather than the actual powers of the president. In doing this, Siaroff measured, quite rightly in my opinion, the most likely form of government, not the president's powers.

Formal and informal institutions were the focus of L. Johannsen and O. Nørgaard (2003). They offered the so-called Index of Presidential Authority (IPA), which is constructed using three main constitutional power resources – symbolic, appointive, and political. In addition, the IPA seeks to account for the method of presidential election (direct or indirect) and length of presidential term. The president can either possess a power in full (coding "1"), in a qualified form (coding "1/2"), or not at all (coding "0") (p. 6). Calculation of the IPA is by way of a specially drawn up formula.

Measuring presidential power is not an easy task for researchers, and, as noted by J. Fortin (2013), includes some "pitfalls" of measurement. She drew attention to the fact that an indice should be valid and reliable: "In constructing composite indices of presidential power, the main dilemma seems to revolve around reaching a balance between exhaustive measurements that are low in validity and reductive measurements that are higher in validity and reliability, but potentially fail to capture important dimensions" (p. 104). She used factor analyses of 29 unweighted and weighted presidential power indicators in 28 post-communist countries, and based on this analysis concentrated on six presidential powers: package veto, partial veto, exclusive introduction of legislation, cabinet dismissal, cabinet formation, censure (pp. 105–106). These elements should be measured by a researcher. Fortin came from the fact that a president is not considered constitutionally powerful "based on his or her holding a myriad of powers (the more items, the more powerful)"; rather, he or she holds a set of key, and universal, central powers (p. 106). If we focus on the main elements of presidential power, we receive equivalent and common indicators for all countries, which allow us to compare them. Fortin rightly proposed following A. Krouwel (2003), who identified "the core elements of presidentialism," rather than including all powers and prerogatives of the president (p. 6).

3. Methodology: From Measuring Presidential Power to Measuring Political Regimes

The method of measurement developed by Krouwel (2003) is, in my view, the most interesting and fruitful. He goes beyond mere analysis of presidential powers to include the "systematic characteristics of political systems as a whole" (p.

6), and sees his task as determining the *level of presidentialism* instead of a mere measurement of presidential prerogatives. Krouwel adopts a two-dimensional approach (pure presidentialism and pure parliamentarism) and offers a new method based on measuring the *presidential score* and *parliamentary score*. He codes the following seven constitutional elements: election of the head of state; dissolution of parliament; ministerial appointments; vote of investiture before a government takes office; vote of confidence; introduction and veto of legislation; and executive powers. In calculating the presidential score, each variable associated with presidentialism receives the score "1," and each variable that is not a characteristic of presidentialism receives the score "0"; when the powers are shared or limited the score is "0.5" (pp. 16–17). The presidential score is the sum of the scores for all seven variables of presidentialism, and the parliamentary score is the sum of the scores for all seven variables of parliamentarism. The level of presidentialism is then calculated by subtracting the parliamentary score from the presidential score. A positive score indicates presidentialism, a negative score indicates parliamentarism, and the higher the score, the higher the level of presidentialism (p. 9). For example, according to Krouwel, the level of presidentialism for Russia is "+4.5," for Lithuania "+0.5," for Poland "0.0," for Romania "-2.0," and for the Czech Republic "-4.5."

Krouwel's method is valuable because it allows us to "weigh" the presidential and parliamentary components of any form of government, whether presidential, parliamentary, or semi-presidential. However, it requires modification, as I have done in my previous works (Zaznaev, 2006; Zaznaev, 2007). In particular, I have amended several variables. I have divided the variable "ministerial appointment" into "appointment of prime minister" and "appointment of ministers," divided "introduction and veto of legislation" into "introduction of legislation" and "veto of legislation," and have excluded Krouwel's "vote of confidence." Finally, I have added two new variables: "compatibility/incompatibility of the position of member of legislature with the government position" and "formation of a new cabinet after the presidential and (or) the parliamentary elections." I eventually proposed ten criteria for measuring different systems, whether presidentialism, parliamentarism, semi-presidentialism, or any other (Zaznaev, 2006, pp. 192–193).

Table 1. The parliamentary and presidential scores

	Criteria	Presidential score	Parliamentary score
A	Election of the head of state	1 – election of the head of state by the people 0.5 – where only one candidate is nominated, he or she is deemed elected without the need for a ballot 0 – the head of state is not elected by the people	1 – the head of state is elected by parliament or a special electoral college, or he or she inherits the post 0.5 – where only one candidate is nominated, he or she is deemed elected without the need for a ballot 0 – the head of state is elected by the people
B	The executive	1 – the head of state/the president holds the executive powers and heads the cabinet (the president's administration) 0.5 – the head of state/the president shares executive powers with the government 0 – the head of state/the president has no executive powers	1 – the executive is the government responsible to parliament 0.5 – the executive powers are shared between the head of state/the president and the government 0 – the government is fully responsible to the head of state/the president
C	Appointment of prime minister	1 – the head of state/the president appoints the prime minister (or the head of state/the president executes functions of the prime minister) 0.5 – the head of state/the president shares the power to appoint the prime minister with parliament (the coordinated appointment) 0 – the head of state/the president does not affect the appointment of the prime minister (or the head of state/the president is forced to consider the party composition of parliament when appointing the prime minister)	1 – the prime minister is appointed by parliament or the head of state/president who is forced to consider the party composition of parliament 0.5 – parliament shares the power to appoint the prime minister with the head of state/the president (the coordinated appointment) 0 – parliament has no power to influence the appointment of the prime minister
D	Appointment of ministers	1 – the head of state/the president alone appoints ministers 0.5 – the head of state/the president shares the prerogative to appoint ministers with the prime minister and/or parliament (the coordinated appointment)	1 – the appointment of ministers is the prerogative of parliament and/or the prime minister 0.5 – parliament (the prime minister) shares the prerogative to appoint ministers with the head of state/the president (the coordinated

		0 – the head of state/the president does not affect the appointment of ministers (or the head of state/the president is forced to consider the opinion of parliament and/or the prime minister)	appointment) 0 – parliament has no power to influence the cabinet portfolio allocation
E	Formation of a new cabinet after...	1 – the presidential election 0.5 – the presidential and the parliamentary elections 0 – the parliamentary election	1 – the parliamentary election 0.5 – the presidential and the parliamentary elections 0 – the presidential election
F	Vote of no confidence	1 – a vote of no confidence can be ignored by the head of state/the president and the government 0.5 – a vote of no confidence <i>always</i> results in the resignation of the government or the dissolution of parliament 0 – a vote of no confidence <i>always</i> results in the resignation of the government (parliament cannot be dissolved in response to a no-confidence vote)	1 – a vote of no confidence <i>always</i> results in the resignation of the government (parliament cannot be dissolved in response to a no-confidence vote) 0.5 – a vote of no confidence <i>always</i> results in the resignation of the government or the dissolution of parliament 0 – a vote of no confidence can be ignored by the head of state/president and the government
G	Introduction of legislation	1 – the head of state/the president has the right to propose legislation, along with parliament (individual MPs, parliamentary groups) and the government 0.5 – the right to propose legislation is vested with the head of state/president, parliament, the government, and other actors (judges, electorate etc.) 0 – the head of state/the president has no right to propose legislation	1 – the right to propose legislation is only vested with parliament (individual MPs, parliamentary groups) and the government 0.5 – the head of state/the president and other actors (judges, electorate etc.) have the right to propose legislation, along with parliament and the government 0 – the head of state/the president has the right to propose legislation, along with parliament (individual MPs, parliamentary groups) and the government
H	Veto of legislation	1 – a qualified majority (2/3; 3/4; 3/5; 4/5) in parliament is required to override a veto of the head of state/the president 0.5 – a qualified or simple majority vote in parliament may override a veto of legislation 0 – there is no veto of the head of state/the president, or despite rejection of a bill put forward by the head of state/the president, it enters into force (and then this bill is passed by referendum)	1 – there is no veto of the head of state/the president, or despite rejection of a bill put forward by the head of state/the president, it enters into force (and then this bill is passed by referendum) 0.5 – a qualified or simple majority vote in parliament may override a veto of legislation 0 – a qualified majority (2/3; 3/4; 3/5; 4/5) in parliament is required to override a veto of the head of state/the president
I	Dissolution of parliament	1 – it is the sole prerogative of the head of state/the president to dissolve parliament 0.5 – the head of state/the president dissolves parliament, but initiated by other actors (the prime minister, parliament etc.) 0 – the head of state/the president has no formal powers to dissolve parliament	1 – the head of state/the president has no formal powers to dissolve parliament 0.5 – the head of state/the president dissolves parliament, but initiated by other actors (the prime minister, parliament etc.) 0 – it is the sole prerogative of the head of state/the president to dissolve parliament
J	Compatibility/incompatibility of the position of member of legislature with the government position	1 – incompatible 0.5 – compatible for members of one chamber of parliament and incompatible for members of another chamber 0 – compatible	1 – compatible 0.5 – compatible for members of one chamber of parliament and incompatible for members of another chamber 0 – incompatible

As with Krouwel's method, the maximum value for each of the 10 criteria is "1," the minimum is "0," and there is the intermediate variant "0.5." Easy to calculate by summing all 10 criterions, the maximum presidential score (*PresS*) and parliamentary score (*ParIS*) may be 10. I suggest that my method of measuring is based on the calculation of the *index of the form of government (IFG)* (Zaznaev, 2006, p. 194; Zaznaev, 2007, p. 152], which is calculated by subtracting the parliamentary score from the presidential score:

$$IFG = PresS - ParIS.$$

A positive *IFG* indicates the attraction of a system to presidentialism, and negative its shift to parliamentarism. The

higher the numerical value of the index, the greater the presidential elements in a system, the lower the more parliamentary. A zero *IFG* shows a balance of power. All states are placed on a scale of “-10” to “+10.” Therefore, calculating *IFG* provides opportunities not only for a more accurate estimation of separate systems, but also for comparing them (Zaznaev, 2007, pp. 162–164). Based on this modified methodology, I calculated the *IFG* of 22 semi-presidential countries in Europe and the former Soviet Union. This allowed me to specify three clusters of such systems: presidentialized (*IFG* from +10 to +4), balanced (*IFG* from +3 to -3), and parliamentarized (*IFG* from -4 to -10) (Zaznaev, 2007, p. 154).

My analysis showed that semi-presidential states of Western, Central, and Eastern Europe are characterized by a shift towards a parliamentary system. In these countries, the leading role is played not by the executive branch headed by the president but by the parliament, and the results of the legislative elections determine the “face” of the regime. Semi-presidential republics of the former USSR (except Lithuania, Armenia, and Ukraine, where there have been substantial parliamentary transformations), by contrast, show a tendency for presidentialism and super-strong presidential power. If you look at the constitutional development of semi-presidential states of Europe and the former Soviet Union in recent years, it is easy to distinguish two trends in dynamics – parliamentarization (Armenia, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine) and presidentialization (Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia etc.) (Zaznaev, 2007, pp. 160–161).

4. Concluding Remarks

Using measurements of presidential power generates a series of questions that must be addressed. Should we consider the formal prerogatives of presidents or informal aspects of presidential authority? Is it necessary to seek the assistance of experts, thus increasing the risk of unreliability? What should the level of measurement be, and what scale of measurement is preferable? Where are the numerical boundaries between strong, moderate, and weak presidencies? Should we take into account the particularities of presidential, parliamentary, and semi-presidential regimes in the measurement? To what extent does the index of presidential power depend on the president's personality, and what differences are there between indexes of presidential power, for example, in Russia under Putin or Medvedev, i.e. how do we measure the dynamics of presidential power?

Quantitative research into forms of government “paves the way” with difficulties. First, skepticism affects academics in the measurement of social phenomena. Second, any measurement is a significant simplification. Therefore, any method of measuring presidential power can be easily criticized as not reflecting the objective reality, or even distorting it. However, despite the difficulties, the measurement of presidential power and the measurement of other components of the legislative-executive relations have gradually offered a perspective on the direction taken in political science.

References

- Fortin, J. (2013). Measuring presidential powers: Some pitfalls of aggregate measurement. *International political science review*, 34 (1), 91-112.
- Frye, T. (1997). A Politics of institutional choice: Post-Communist Presidencies. *Comparative political studies*, 30 (5), 523–552.
- Hellman, J. (1996). Constitutions and economic reform in the postcommunist transitions. *East European Constitutional Review*, (5), 46-53.
- Johannsen, L. & Nørgaard, O. (2003). *IPA: The index of presidential authority. Explorations into the measurement and impact of a political institution*. Paper prepared for the ECPR joint sessions of workshops, Edinburgh, 28 March – 4 April 2003.
- Krouwel, A. (2003). *Measuring presidentialism of Central and East European countries*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit. (Working papers political science, 2003, (02).
- Linz, J. (1990). The Perils of Presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy*, 1 (1), 51-69.
- McGregor, J. (1994). The presidency in East Central Europe. *RFR/RL Research Report*, 3 (2): 23-31. [Online] Available: <http://glennschool.osu.edu/faculty/brown/Failed%20States%20Readings/The%20Presidency20in%20East%20Central%20Europe.pdf> (April 17, 2014)
- Shugart, M. S. & Carey, J.M. (1992). *Presidents and Assemblies. Constitutional design and electoral dynamics*. Cambridge: Cambridge univ. press.
- Siaroff, A. (2003). Comparative presidencies: The inadequacy of the presidential, semi-presidential and parliamentary distinction. *European journal of political research*, 42, 287-312.
- Zaznaev, O. (2006). *Semi-Presidentialism: Theoretical and Applied Aspects*. Kazan: Kazan State University. (in Russian)
- Zaznaev, O. (2007). The Index Analysis of Semi-Presidential States of Europe and the Post-Soviet Space. *Polis (Political Studies)*, (2), 146–164. (in Russian)
- Zaznaev, O. (2014). Understanding Semi-Presidentialism in Political Science: A Review of the Latest Debate. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 30 (2), 195-198.