This book provides a framework for analyzing the impact of the separation of powers on party politics. Conventional political science wisdom assumes that democracy is impossible without political parties, because parties fulfill all the key functions of democratic governance. They nominate candidates, coordinate campaigns, aggregate interests, formulate and implement policy, and manage government power. When scholars first asserted the essential connection between parties and democracy, most of the world’s democracies were parliamentary. Yet by the dawn of the 21st century, most democracies had directly elected presidents. Given this, if parties are truly critical to democracy, then a systematic understanding of how the separation of powers shapes parties is long overdue. David J. Samuels and Matthew S. Shugart provide a theoretical framework for analyzing variation in the relationships among presidents, parties, and prime ministers across the world’s democracies, revealing the important ways in which the separation of powers alters party organization and behavior—thereby changing the nature of democratic representation and accountability.

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Presidents, Parties, and Prime Ministers

How the Separation of Powers Affects Party Organization and Behavior

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To our families, for all their support
Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments  page ix

1 Introduction  1
   Democracies with Elected Presidents Are Now in the Majority  4
   The Comparative Study of Political Parties and the Missing Variable of Regime-Type  7
   Clues from Existing Research  12
   “Presidentialized” versus “Parliamentarized” Parties  14
   Outline of the Book  18

2 Political Parties in the Neo-Madisonian Theoretical Framework  22
   Democratic Regimes and the Neo-Madisonian Framework  25
   Parties in the Neo-Madisonian Framework  34
   Situating Parties within the Separation of Powers  36
   President-Party Relationships under Semi-Presidentialism  39
   Party Dilemmas under the Separation of Powers  46
   Conclusion  53
   Appendix 2A: Cohabitation in Semi-Presidential Systems – Cases and Data  55

3 Insiders and Outsiders: Madison’s Dilemma and Leadership Selection  62
   Defining Insiders and Outsiders  65
   Insiders versus Outsiders: Hypotheses  68
   Career Paths of Insiders and Outsiders  72
   Limits of Presidentialization in Hybrid Regimes  83
   Conclusion  90
   Appendix 3A: Constructing the Database on Leaders’ Career Paths  91
## Contents

4 Constitutional Design and Intraparty Leadership  
   Accountability  94  
   Firing Party Agents under Parliamentarism  95  
   Firing Prime Ministers under Semi-Presidentialism  98  
   Firing a Directly Elected President  108  
   Conclusion  120  

5 Electoral Separation of Purpose within Political Parties  123  
   Electoral Separation of Purpose: The Physical Separation of Votes  126  
   Sources of Variation in Electoral Separation of Purpose  128  
   Measuring Electoral Separation of Purpose  130  
   Illustrative Examples of Electoral Separation of Purpose  132  
   The Global Extent of Electoral Separation of Purpose  142  
   Conclusion  150  
   Appendix 5A: Sources for District-Level Electoral Data  152  
   Appendix 5B: Countries and Elections Included  159  

6 The Impact of Constitutional Change on Party Organization and Behavior  162  
   Constitutional Reforms and Expectations for Party Adaptation  164  
   Presidentialized Parties in France  170  
   Presidentialized Parties in Israel  179  
   Conclusion  190  

7 Parties’ “Presidential Dilemmas” in Brazil and Mexico  193  
   Presidential Dilemmas in Brazilian Parties  194  
   Presidential Dilemmas in Mexican Parties  204  
   Conclusion  215  

8 Presidents, Prime Ministers, and Mandate Representation  218  
   Parties, Presidents, and Political Representation  222  
   Policy-Switching or Mandate Representation: A Global Exploration  231  
   Conclusion  247  

9 Conclusion  249  
   Semi-Presidentialism Is More Presidential Than Parliamentary  255  
   Pure Types and Hybrids: Implications of Trends in Constitutional Design  257  
   The Research Agenda  262  

References  265  
Index  289
Preface and Acknowledgments

This book brings together strands each of us has been thinking about for many years. Shugart’s interest in the “distinctiveness” of presidential democracy and its impact on legislative elections and political parties began as he was working on his dissertation at the University of California, Irvine. In the dissertation, inspired largely by the work of Leon Epstein as well as by his own observations of politics in the United States and several Latin American countries, Shugart (1988) noted that presidentialism had an impact on both the number of parties and their “nature.” Yet developing just what that nature might be would lie dormant while he focused for a time on the number of parties and worked on other aspects of comparative presidentialism. Later, after taking up a faculty position at the University of California, San Diego, Shugart would begin exploring the “intraparty dimension” of parties – the idea that electoral institutions would shape the behavior and organization of parties as much as, and maybe even more profoundly than, they shape their number. However, he would not put together these two strands – that both presidentialism and legislative electoral institutions shape political parties – until some years later, in collaboration with Samuels.

In 1993, in his first semester of graduate school at the University of California, San Diego, Samuels scribbled a comment in the margins of Kaare Strom’s 1990 article, “A Behavioral Theory of Competitive Political Parties” (American Journal of Political Science 34: 565–98). Samuels wrote, “But that is not how parties behave in presidential systems.” Eventually, he tried to explain the sorts of behavioral incentives parties actually face in presidential systems in his 2002 article, “Presidentialized
Preface and Acknowledgments


After publishing that article, Samuels realized that an article Shugart had published in 1998, “The Inverse Relationship between Party Strength and Executive Strength: A Theory of Politicians’ Constitutional Choices” (British Journal of Political Science 28: 1–29), essentially told the flip side of the story he’d articulated in his 2002 article. As Shugart told it, party organization influences the structure of executive-legislative relations when politicians get to rewrite the political rules of the game. And as Samuels told it, the structure of executive-legislative relations then influences party organization and behavior. Samuels then approached Shugart with the idea of building on their shared view that scholars had largely ignored the relationship between the separation of powers and political party organization and behavior.

Several years later, this book is the product of tying together the strands of our earlier work and graduate-seminar inspiration. For helping us along the way, we would like to thank the following people. For research assistance: Jason Arnold, Andrew Dickinson (in memoriam), Fernando Furquim, Michelle Hogler, Catalina Hotung, Kevin Lucas, Mihaela Mihailescu, Will Moody, Kuniaki Nemoto, Stephanie Payne, Matthew Roberts, Amit Ron, Jessica Schroeder, Kevin Watt, and Kimberly Wydeen. For comments and inspiration: Matthew Cleary, Scott Desposato, James Druckman, Leon Epstein, Jen Gandhi, Henry Hale, Reuven Hazan, Gretchen Helmke, Kathy Hochstetler, Yuko Kasuya, Ofer Kenig, Scott Mainwaring, Tom Round, Phil Shively, Georg Vanberg, Alisa Voznaya, and Erik Wibbels. Participants in Shugart’s graduate seminar on legislative and party organization in the spring of 2009 offered comments that helped improve the book, and the anonymous reviewer for Cambridge University Press helped us strengthen several of our arguments. We are also grateful to Robert Elgie for regularly answering queries about semi-presidential systems and cohabitation and to Eduardo Leoni for sharing his data on Brazilian roll-call votes. A grant from the National Science Foundation to Samuels made possible the collection of the district-level presidential election results used in Chapter 5.

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Preface and Acknowledgments

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