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Presidents, Assembly Dissolution and the Electoral Performance of Prime Ministers

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Abstract

Many European presidents have extensive constitutional powers to affect the timing of early parliamentary elections, which enables them to influence when incumbent governments must face the electorate. This paper examines whether presidents use their assembly dissolution powers for partisan benefit. To date, presidential activism in the electoral arena of parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies remains poorly understood. We hypothesize that presidents use their powers to influence election calling for the advantage of their political allies in government. To test this argument, we use data on 190 elections in eighteen European democracies. Our results suggest that presidents with significant dissolution powers are able to shape the electoral success of incumbents. Prime ministers whose governments are allied to such presidents realize a vote and seat share bonus of around five per cent. These findings have implications for our understanding of presidential activism, strategic parliamentary dissolution and electoral accountability.

The overwhelming majority of Europe's presidential heads of state, both popularly and indirectly elected, have some influence on the timing of parliamentary elections (Strøm & Swindle, 2002).¹ They may have a role in initiating or advancing the process of parliamentary dissolution and most presidents are empowered to take the ultimate decision to dissolve. Can such presidents use their powers to promote the electoral fortunes of governments that they support? Politicians, journalists, and the public commonly believe that a well-timed election,

¹ European constitutions grant both popularly and indirectly elected presidents powers to influence parliamentary dissolution and we examine how both types of presidents employ their powers. A debate focuses on the question whether direct election gives presidents greater legitimacy to employ their powers (Duverger, 1980; Tavits, 2009). We reserve judgment on this question and control for the method of election in our empirical analysis.

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3 which coincides with circumstances that favor the incumbent, can make a crucial difference
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5 between a government's reelection or defeat. If presidents use their influence on election
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7 calling for partisan advantage, then governments that are allied to the president, i.e., those in
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9 which the presidential party holds the premiership or is a coalition partner, may face the
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11 electorate under systematically more favorable conditions than their peers who lack
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13 presidential support. The political relationship between the government and a president who
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15 can influence election timing may therefore crucially shape the incumbent's electoral success.
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19 Consider the following examples. In May 1968, the French president de Gaulle called
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21 an early election, enabling his political allies in government to reassert their authority and
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23 confront a student rebellion and general strike (Wilson, 1969, p. 551). Strong economic
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25 growth and the unprecedented political stability, which the French Fifth Republic had
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27 experienced up to this point (Wilson, 1969: 567), benefitted the Gaullist-led governing
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29 coalition's electoral popularity, and both governing parties increased their vote share
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31 compared to the previous legislative election (Thiebault, 2000, p. 526). As a result, the
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33 Gaullists weathered the difficult political situation, returned to government and held on to the
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35 premiership (Thiebault, 2000, pp. 500-501). The choice of Italian president Francesco
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37 Cossiga to call early elections in 1987 proved equally decisive in shoring up the governing
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39 coalition, while helping his political allies, the Christian Democrats (DC) to the premiership.
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41 President Cossiga, a longstanding member of the DC, called the election to end a prolonged
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43 political crisis that had resulted when the five party coalition government led by the socialist
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45 PSI under Bettino Craxi with participation of the DC collapsed (Donovan, 1988, pp. 130-131,
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47 Verzichelli & Cotta, 2000, p. 454). By allowing early elections during a period of strong
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49 economic growth (Bull, 2015, p. 299), Cossiga achieved two results. The two leading parties
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51 within the coalition, the PSI and the DC, were able to shore up their electoral dominance at
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53 the expense of the opposition communist party (PCI) (Verzichelli & Cotta, 2000, p. 491), and
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3 the DC reasserted its leading position as the largest parliamentary party, permitting it to claim
4 the premiership (Donovan, 1988, p. 131). These two cases are illustrative of a wider
5 empirical pattern documented in the case oriented literature, which suggests that presidents
6 pay close attention to electoral prospects of their political allies when they permit or invoke
7 parliamentary dissolution (a more extensive discussion is available in SI 1).
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14 This paper examines whether Europe's presidential heads of state are able to affect
15 the electoral performance of incumbents systematically through their influence on
16 parliamentary election timing.² Previous research suggests that the electoral fortunes of prime
17 ministers and governments are centrally shaped by their policy performance, in particular the
18 state of the economy (Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Duch & Stevenson,
19 2008). This focus of the literature on performance voting also extends to other policy areas
20 (Hobolt et al., 2013, Klašnja et al., 2016), and in semi-presidential democracies, it has even
21 been shown to apply when the two parts of the dual executive - government and the
22 presidency - are controlled by different parties or party coalitions (Lewis-Beck, 1997;
23 Hellwig & Samuels, 2008).³ To the extent that previous research has acknowledged a
24 presidential influence on the electoral performance of prime ministers and governments, it
25 has focused on presidential coattail effects, i.e., the effect of direct presidential elections on
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42 ² We include parliamentary republics and semi-presidential democracies in our study because
43 presidents in both regime types may be endowed with constitutional powers to influence
44 parliamentary dissolution and must work with governments dependent on assembly
45 confidence in pursuing their political goals. Presidents in both types of democracies may
46 therefore have motivations and opportunities to dissolve the legislature for partisan gain.
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53 ³ Under unified government, i.e., when the president's party also controls the premiership,
54 voters are expected to reward or punish the governing party for its policy performance in all
55 national elections (Hellwig & Samuels, 2008, p. 70).
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3 the results that parties achieve in the parliamentary race (Samuels & Shugart 2010, pp. 127-8;
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5 Golder, 2006; Stoll, 2005). These studies make valuable contributions to our understanding
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7 of the electoral performance of governments and prime ministers, but they build on the
8
9 shared assumption that the timing of legislative elections is generally exogenously
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11 determined. In reality, however, presidential heads of state in most European democracies
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13 have some ability to influence when elections are called. This gives rise to the question
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15 whether presidents employ this influence for partisan benefit.
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19 A sizable literature shows that European presidents are political actors who use their
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21 constitutional powers to pursue policy, office and electoral goals (Duverger, 1980; Shugart &
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23 Carey, 1992; Elgie, 1999; Strøm & Swindle, 2002; Protsyk, 2005; Tavits, 2009). To
24
25 presidents, a parliamentary dissolution that benefits their political allies can have numerous
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27 benefits – it may return the presidential party to office, give the president influence on
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29 ministerial selection and open up opportunities to advance policies that reflect presidential
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31 preferences (O’Neil, 1993; Millard, 2000; Amorim Neto & Costa Lobo, 2009; van Ooyen,
32
33 2015). Thus, presidents who work in coordination with their political allies in government
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35 can achieve significant success in implementing their policy goals and building their own
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37 political reputation as well as that of their party.⁴
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41 In this paper, we offer a first account of presidential activism in the electoral arena of
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43 European democracies. We focus on the electoral performance of the prime minister, because
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46 ⁴ The literature on semi-presidential democracies refers to situations in which presidents have
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48 an alliance to the government as *unified* government and situations in which the president’s
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50 party is not in government as *cohabitation*. However, this terminology is not used in studies
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52 of parliamentary democracies. For this reason we choose a terminology that applies equally
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54 in semi-presidential and parliamentary democracies and refer to governments as allied or not
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56 allied to the president.
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3 of its central and privileged importance in the process of democratic electoral accountability.
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5 Prime ministers have primary political and administrative responsibility for the decisions of
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7 their governments and voters focus predominantly on the prime minister's party in holding
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9 the government to account for its achievements and failures in office (Anderson, 2000; Duch
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11 & Stevenson, 2013, 2015; Lewis Beck, 1997).⁵ Presidents with significant control over early
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13 election calling, we argue, affect this pivotal accountability relationship. They can condition
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15 the timing of elections and pick the circumstances of the voters' reckoning to benefit their
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17 political allies. As a result prime ministers, whose cabinets have the support of a president
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19 with significant dissolution power, can be expected to outperform their peers who lack such
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21 political ties.⁶ We test this argument using data on 190 elections in eighteen European
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23 democracies. Our results reveal that presidents with at least intermediate dissolution powers
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25 significantly affect election outcomes. Prime ministers whose governments are allied to such
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27 presidents realize a vote and seat share bonus of around five percentage points.⁷
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33 ⁵ In semi-presidential democracies during periods of unified government, the prime minister's
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35 party is of course also the presidential party.

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37 ⁶ While we focus on the influence that presidents exert on the electoral performance of prime
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39 ministers, our study also lays the foundations for further work on presidential influence in
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41 legislative elections. Most notably, our results raise the question how presidents may be able
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43 to affect the electoral performance of their own party (whether in or out of government) and
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45 their party's closest competitors. Our work thereby opens up a wider research agenda
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47 concerning the effects of presidential activism in the electoral arena.

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50 ⁷ To reiterate, we do not propose that governments become more popular when early
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52 elections are called. Our argument is that a president's influence on election timing allows
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54 incumbents allied to the president to benefit electorally because the elections are
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56 systematically timed to circumstances that favor the incumbent.
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3 These results have implications for three important areas in comparative politics. To
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5 the literature on presidential activism in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies,
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7 our study contributes a better appreciation of the political consequences of presidential
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9 assembly dissolution powers, which opens up a new research agenda, focusing on
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11 presidential activism in the electoral arena. Our work also has relevance for the extensive
12
13 literature on strategic election timing by incumbents. By highlighting the assembly
14
15 dissolution powers of presidents and their electoral consequences, our findings suggest that
16
17 presidential influence is likely to be a central and omitted factor in this literature's accounts
18
19 of election timing in parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies. Finally, our work has
20
21 implications for studies of electoral accountability because it suggests that presidents with
22
23 significant dissolution powers may be able to moderate the accountability of prime ministers
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25 for political failure and their ability to reap the fruits of good performance.
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32 **Elections and incumbent popularity**

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34 A well-established literature in political science argues that the electoral support of
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36 incumbents is critically shaped by government performance (Key 1966, Fiorina 1981, Powell
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38 2000). The majority of these studies focus on accountability for economic outcomes (Fiorina,
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40 1981; Nannestad & Paldam, 1994; Lewis-Beck & Stegmaier, 2000; Powell, 2000). The
41
42 central finding of this work is that voters are performance oriented: When the economy is
43
44 performing well, they reward the government, when economic performance is poor, they vote
45
46 against the incumbent. The link between economic conditions and the electoral support of
47
48 incumbents is well documented in studies that use survey data and in work that employs
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50 objective economic indicators (Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Kayser & Peress, 2012; Nadeau et
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52 al., 2012). There is also evidence that performance voting extends beyond economic voting to
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54 other aspects of government performance (Hobolt et al., 2013, Klašnja et al., 2016), and that
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3 it applies in semi-presidential democracies, even when the two parts of the dual executive -
4 government and the presidency - are controlled by different parties or party coalitions. Lewis-
5 Beck (1997), for instance, finds that in France, cohabitation (i.e., control of the government
6 and the presidency by opposing parties or party coalitions) reinforces, rather than weakens,
7 the public perception that accountability for the national economy lies with the government.
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9 Hellwig & Samuels (2008) confirm this finding in a comparative context.

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16 In addition, voter perceptions of the incumbent's competence can be influenced by the
17 governing parties' performance in winning control of other positions of power in a political
18 system, as the literature on presidential coattails makes clear (Golder, 2006; Stoll, 2015).
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20 Legislative elections do not take place in a vacuum, and parties that field popular and
21 successful candidates in direct elections for the presidency are typically perceived as more
22 competent by voters than their less successful peers. This tends to benefit their performance
23 in the legislative elections, particularly when the two elections are held in close temporal
24 proximity (Samuels & Shugart, 2010, pp. 146-150). When the elections are held further apart
25 in time, intervening events reduce the probability that a governing party's performance in the
26 parliamentary elections will benefit from its success in the presidential race.

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38 One implication of these findings is that politicians with influence on election timing
39 may prefer to call elections when the popularity of governments that they support is high,
40 rather than at random times. That is, the timing of elections is likely to be consequential
41 because incumbents do better at the polls when they look most competent. This raises two
42 questions, (i) whether election timing is used to influence in which context elections are held
43 and (ii) whether parliamentary dissolution powers confer a partisan advantage on those in
44 whom they have been vested.

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54 The political economy literature on opportunistic election timing addresses the first of
55 these questions – whether elections are timed to influence in which context the poll is held.
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3 Building on the observation that election dates in parliamentary democracies are not fixed,
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5 this literature assumes that *governments themselves* control election calling and examines
6
7 how far incumbents time election to circumstances that favour them, a strategy referred to as
8
9 “political surfing” (Chowdhury, 1993; Ito, 1990; Ito & Park, 1988; Palmer & Whitten, 2000).
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11 This research uncovers evidence of political surfing in different contexts. For example, Ito
12
13 and Park (1988) show that Japanese elections are timed to coincide with favourable economic
14
15 shocks, Chowdhury (1993) finds that economic growth influences Indian election timing, and
16
17 Voia and Ferris (2013) document that business cycle peaks predict election calls in Canada.
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19 Cross-national evidence, however, is less consistent. Although several studies document
20
21 political surfing in comparative work (Palmer & Whitten, 2000; Schleiter & Tavits, 2016),
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23 others find no evidence of it (Alesina & Roubini, 1992; Alesina, Cohen & Roubini, 1993).
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25 There are also theoretical reasons to anticipate that many governments are unable to surf.
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27 Recent studies show that only a minority of European constitutions grant incumbent
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29 governments and prime ministers sole discretion to dissolve (Strøm & Swindle, 2002;
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31 Goplerud & Schleiter, 2016). A central assumption of the opportunistic election timing
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33 literature – that the power to time early elections generally lies with the incumbent
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35 government – is therefore often mistaken.
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41 Indeed, as Strøm and Swindle (2002, p. 576) observe, most contemporary European
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43 constitutions which permit parliamentary dissolution “place the ultimate decision in the hands
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45 of the head of state ... [and i]n some cases, France and Italy among them, the head of state is
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47 constitutionally free to dissolve parliament at his or her discretion.” More commonly,
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49 however, the president has a more limited role in initiating, advancing or taking the final
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51 decision in a dissolution process that also involves other political actors. Several studies
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53 suggest that presidents use these powers in a politically consequential manner. Schleiter and
54
55 Morgan-Jones (2009) show that presidential dissolution powers affect early government
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3 terminations. According to Fernandes and Magalhaes (2015), presidents with full
4 constitutional discretion to dissolve parliament precipitate early elections more frequently
5 than their peers without such powers in semi-presidential democracies. Less powerful
6 presidents, who are only able to veto parliamentary dissolution, too, exercise their
7 prerogatives and limit early election calling by incumbent governments (Strøm and Swindle,
8 2002, p. 589). These studies provide compelling evidence that presidential dissolution powers
9 affect government terminations and the frequency of early elections, which raises the obvious
10 question whether presidents realize a partisan advantage for prime ministers to whom they
11 are allied by using these powers. To date, there are no comparative studies that examine the
12 electoral consequences of the presidential use of dissolution powers. In this paper, we provide
13 the first such analysis and significantly advance the understanding of presidential activism.
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30 **Presidents, assembly dissolution, and the electoral success of prime ministers**

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32 Studies of presidential activism suggest that the impact of presidential preferences on
33 political outcomes is conditioned by institutional rules (Amorim Neto & Strøm, 2006; Tavits,
34 2009). The consensus in this literature is that presidential goals affect outcomes when a
35 president has the constitutional powers to pursue them. That is, presidents with the political
36 motivation to influence election timing can be expected to do so only when they have
37 significant constitutional powers to dissolve parliament and not otherwise. An adequate
38 understanding of presidential influence on dissolution therefore requires attention to a
39 president's political preferences and constitutional powers. We discuss each of these factors
40 in turn.
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52 Presidents can be expected to prefer that governments to which they are allied face
53 elections when conditions are favorable. As politicians, European presidential heads of state,
54 whether directly or indirectly elected, must work with governments dependent on legislative
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3 support in pursuing their political goals (Duverger, 1980; Shugart & Carey, 1992; Elgie,
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5 1999; Strøm & Swindle, 2002; Tavits 2009). Moreover, in most of Europe's democracies
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7 with presidential heads of state, single party majorities are rare. Presidential parties therefore
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9 hardly ever govern on their own, but participate in government as part of a coalition. For
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11 presidents, a parliamentary election that rewards a government to which they are allied, i.e., a
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13 government in which their party controls the premiership or is a coalition partner, has
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15 multiple benefits. It may enable the presidential party to hold on to office, which can afford
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17 presidents influence on government formation and may even allow them to hand-pick
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19 individual ministers (Protsyk, 2005; Tavits 2009). A good election result can also
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21 significantly shape the dynamics of policy making to the president's advantage. It may align
22
23 the cabinet's policy preferences with the president's, reducing the potential for conflict and
24
25 delays in policymaking and assist presidents in realizing their policy goals (Ward, 1994;
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27 Urbanavicius, 1999; Morris, 1994). Thus, legislative elections that benefit a president's
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29 political allies make a successful working relationship between the president and the
30
31 government more likely. This not only helps presidents to build their personal reputation as
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33 effective politicians, but a successful period in office can also contribute to legitimizing the
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35 institution of the presidency itself (McMenamin, 2008). In sum, presidents whose allies are in
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37 government are more likely to be successful in influencing government formation, promoting
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39 their policy goals, building their political reputation and the legitimacy of their office. As a
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41 result, presidents can be expected to prefer that legislative elections occur under conditions
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43 that favour the incumbent when their political allies are in government, but not otherwise.
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50 However, not all presidents have the constitutional powers to achieve this goal.
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52 Several studies document that presidential powers to influence parliamentary dissolution and
53
54 election timing vary extensively in European constitutions (Shugart & Carey, 1992; Metcalf,
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56 2000; Strøm & Swindle, 2002). Dissolution processes are often complex. They may involve
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3 multiple steps and conditions, can be subject to temporal constraints (e.g., dissolution may
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5 not be permitted within a specified time period before or after assembly or presidential
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7 elections), and may engage a range of political actors. Recent studies differ in their
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9 conceptualization and measurement of a president's influence on the dissolution process.
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11 Strøm and Swindle (2002), for instance, distinguish between powerless heads of state,
12
13 presidents with prerogatives to veto parliamentary dissolution and presidents who can
14
15 dissolve parliament unilaterally. The most comprehensive attempt to measure presidential
16
17 influence on parliamentary dissolution constructs a 10-point scale that records presidential
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19 powers to (i) initiate the dissolution process, (ii) advance it and (iii) decide parliamentary
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21 dissolution, taking account of the political and temporal constraints that constitutions may
22
23 impose on the use of these powers (Goplerud & Schleiter, 2016). Constitutional dissolution
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25 powers give presidents the means to influence election calling: Presidents with greater
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27 constitutional influence on parliamentary dissolution can be expected to have more extensive
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29 opportunities to shape election timing than their peers with weaker powers.
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35 There are several reasons to anticipate that presidents can improve the re-election
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37 prospects of their political allies by using their assembly dissolution powers. An extensive
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39 literature consistently finds that voters reward incumbents whose policies are performing well
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41 (see Nadeau et al., 2012 for a recent review; see also Duch & Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck
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43 & Stegmaier, 2000; Nannenstad & Paldam, 1994). Voters have also been shown to reward
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45 incumbents (and other parties) that demonstrate competence in other electoral races, most
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47 notably the race for a popularly elected presidency (Samuels & Shugart, 2010). A
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49 government's chances of re-election are improved if early elections can be held to coincide
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51 with favourable conditions such as a peak in economic performance, good results in other
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53 policy areas, or success in a presidential race. Delaying the poll to the next regular election
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55 date gives rise to risks, because a government's popularity advantage is never guaranteed and
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3 may be eroded by an unforeseen downturn in performance, policy shocks or scandals. For
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5 popular incumbents, then, a president's willingness to acquiesce in premature elections can
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7 make the difference between a government's ability to profit electorally from a peak in its
8
9 popularity and its inability to do so. In crises too, governments stand to benefit from
10
11 presidential support. As the French early election of 1968 illustrates, even in the context of
12
13 severe crisis, early elections may still benefit the incumbents if their popularity remains high
14
15 enough to make electoral victory likely. Whether or not presidents enable access to early
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17 elections for such governments can therefore make a crucial difference to the incumbent's
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19 ability to reassert control of the situation and to hold on to power. Thus presidents who use
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21 their election calling powers are likely to be able to improve the electoral prospects of their
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23 political allies in government.
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28 In sum, we anticipate that presidents with extensive influence on assembly dissolution
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30 use early elections to promote the electoral fortunes of their allies. Prime ministers whose
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32 governments are allied to such presidents should therefore face elections under systematically
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34 more favourable conditions than (i) prime ministers who lack a political alliance with a
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36 powerful president and (ii) prime ministers who work with presidents that lack significant
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38 influence on dissolution.⁸ These expectations are summarized in the following hypothesis:
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46 ⁸ Note, that this argument applies to the electoral performance of prime ministers in early as
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48 well as regular elections: Incumbents who can access to early elections with presidential
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50 support under favourable conditions are by definition less likely to face regular elections once
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52 their popularity advantage has been eroded. Conversely, incumbents who are confident of
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54 their ability to perform well in regular elections are more likely to be able to complete their
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56 full term if have the support of a president with extensive dissolution powers.
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3 Prime ministers on average outperform their peers electorally when they (i) lead a
4 government that is allied to a president *and* (ii) the president has extensive
5 constitutional powers to influence election calling, but not otherwise.
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10 11 **Empirical strategy**

12 A potential challenge in testing our hypothesis is that the same underlying conditions which
13 lead to a government's alliance with the president may also affect the electoral performance
14 of the prime minister. For instance, as noted above, it is likely that parties, which capture the
15 presidency because they are competent and therefore popular, also perform well in
16 parliamentary elections. The empirical task, therefore, is to distinguish the effect of
17 presidential dissolution powers from the benefit that PM parties may derive from their
18 underlying competence and popularity.
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29 Our research design enables us to address this concern about the endogeneity of an
30 alliance to the president and PM electoral success by focusing on the *difference between two*
31 *conditional effects*, i.e., the effect on the incumbent PM's electoral performance of an alliance
32 to the president at high and low levels of presidential dissolution powers. The difference
33 between these conditional effects can be estimated without bias if the potential source of
34 endogeneity between an alliance to the president and the electoral performance of the PM
35 (i.e., the underlying competence and popularity of the parties) is equally present in settings in
36 which the president has high and low assembly dissolution powers. Under this assumption,
37 the conditional effect of an alliance to a president at each level of presidential assembly
38 dissolution power is independent of the potential source of endogeneity (see Rajan &
39 Zingales, 1998, and Frye, 2010 for a similar approach).
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54 The competence and popularity of any particular party is unlikely to be systematically
55 correlated with the level of presidential assembly dissolution power for two reasons. First,
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3 constitutional dissolution regimes were typically forged as part of a wider constitutional
4 settlement in moments of crisis, revolution, regime collapse, defeat in war, or independence
5 (Elster 1995, p. 371). These critical junctures were characterized by a high level of
6 uncertainty about the effects of institutional rules given the rapidly changing political context.
7 Against this background attempts to choose institutions that maximized the interests of
8 particular parties were generally unsuccessful. For example, Andrews and Jackman (2005, p.
9 65) find with respect to East Central Europe that extreme uncertainty prevented party leaders
10 “from making choices that served their self-interest.”⁹ Instead, constitutional settlements were
11 frequently informed by a historically contingent understanding of how best to secure
12 democracy,¹⁰ and negotiated in forums such as constituent assemblies, that required
13 consensus among a wide range of actors, precisely to ensure that the settlement did not
14 systematically reflect the interests of any specific party.
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30 Second, both West and East European constitutions are entrenched in order to
31 forestall change by any particular popular party for its own benefit. In practice, entrenchment
32 requires the support of broad coalitions to realize constitutional change in the form of super-
33 majorities and even cross temporal coalitions (when intervening elections are required for a
34 constitutional change to take effect). As a result changes to the rules of parliamentary
35 dissolution, like other constitutional changes, require a level of cross-partisan support that
36 forestalls a systematic correlation between the electoral popularity of any particular party and
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46 ⁹ See also Ginsburg, Elkins and Blount (2009) who find no evidence that legislatures
47 produce constitutions with more parliamentary power than do constituent assemblies.
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50 ¹⁰ For instance, the broad consensus regarding the need to constrain the executive’s powers to
51 dissolve parliament in the German Basic Law after World War II was powerfully shaped by
52 the misuse of parliamentary dissolution during the crisis of the Weimar Republic (Shugart &
53 Carey, 1992 pp. 148-166).
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3 the level of presidential dissolution power. In sum, high and low levels of presidential
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5 assembly dissolution powers can plausibly be conceived as independent of a PM party's
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7 underlying popularity and competence. This makes it possible to estimate the difference
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9 between the conditional effect of an alliance to the president at each level of presidential
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11 assembly dissolution power without bias.
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14 Our empirical analysis now proceeds in two steps: We begin with a simple unadjusted
15
16 difference-of-means test comparing the electoral performance of PM parties who are and are
17
18 not allied to presidents with strong and weak influence on the parliamentary dissolution. We
19
20 then turn to a controlled comparative analysis contrasting the two conditional effects of
21
22 interest, i.e., the effect on a PM's electoral performance of being allied to a president with
23
24 extensive, rather than restricted influence on dissolution. Although the first part of the
25
26 analysis does not take account of confounding influences, it sheds some valuable preliminary
27
28 light on our theory. If our hypothesis is true, PMs who are allied to a president with
29
30 significant influence on election timing should on average perform better electorally than
31
32 their peers who lack such an alliance or who are allied to a president that lacks influence on
33
34 election timing. If the anticipated effect is evident in unadjusted difference-of-means tests
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36 and in more complex, controlled comparative analyses, we can be more confident that it is
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38 not an artefact of post-hoc statistical adjustments and modelling choices.
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45 **Data and variables**

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47 To test our hypothesis we construct an original dataset covering 190 elections in 18 European
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49 democracies with presidential heads of state from 1945, or democratization, to June 2013.¹¹
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51 The data are organized as country-election panels.
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55 ¹¹ The democracies included are Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, France,
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57 Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal,
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3 Throughout, we employ two alternative measures of our dependent variable, PM
4 electoral performance: the *vote share* and the *seat share of the PM party* in elections to the
5 lower (or sole) house of parliament (information about all variables and data sources is
6 available in appendix 1).
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11 Our first explanatory variable records whether or not the president is allied to the
12 government. To capture the political relationship of the president with the government we
13 record whether the president's party is in government either as the PM's party or as a
14 coalition partner (*alliance to president*). In instances in which presidents lack party affiliation
15 and cabinets are technical, we record that the presidential party is not represented in
16 government.¹² To measure our second explanatory variable – *presidential dissolution powers*
17 – we draw on the index of presidential dissolution power developed by Goplerud and
18 Schleiter (2016). The index records the constitutional (i.e., *de jure*) powers of presidents to
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Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Since we focus on European democracies with presidential heads of state, our data do not include constitutional monarchies. This shapes the baseline category for comparison. In monarchies, the power to dissolve parliament typically lies with the prime minister, whereas republics usually constrain the discretion of the head of government. Hence, if the president is not empowered to dissolve parliament in a republic, the path to dissolution is typically constrained.

¹² We also implement an alternative coding for non-party presidents who were elected with the support of the governing party or coalition. It is possible to view these presidents as allied to the government by virtue of their electoral alliance and despite their non-party status. Additionally, we explore the implications of dropping technical cabinets from the analysis rather than treating them as equivalent to cases in which the presidential party is excluded from government. Our findings are robust to these specifications (see robustness checks below).

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3 bring about the pre-term dissolution of the parliament. It is anchored at one end at a minimum
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5 value of 0, denoting presidents who have no influence on dissolution (i.e., Slovenia) and at
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7 the other end by a maximum value of 10, which records the complete discretion of a
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9 president to dissolve the parliament (i.e., Finland 1919). To this maximum value, the index
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11 applies penalties for different types of constraints on a president's ability to call pre-term
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13 elections, including (i) constraints on the president's agenda setting role in initiating and
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15 advancing the dissolution process,¹³ (ii) constraints on the ability to trigger dissolution,¹⁴ (iii)
16
17 time-related constraints on early election calling, for example a ban on dissolution for part of
18
19 the parliamentary or presidential term, and (iv) the conditionality of a president's ability to
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21 initiate, advance or decide dissolution on the binding consent or non-binding consultation of
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23 one (or more) further actors. The penalties are applied multiplicatively to the maximum score
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25 of 10 for each president. When a constitution foresees multiple paths to dissolution, the index
26
27 focusses on the maximum score for a president across any of the paths available to them on
28
29 the assumption that presidents will use the dissolution path that they can most easily
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31 influence (scores reported in appendix 2).
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38 **Analysis**

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40 To examine how presidents shape the electoral fate of prime ministers, we begin with simple
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42 difference-of-means tests. Recall that we expect cabinets which are allied to presidents with
43
44 extensive dissolution powers to outperform their peers electorally on average. For the
45
46 purposes of this analysis we dichotomize presidential dissolution powers and distinguish
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50 ¹³ A president may, for instance, have the power to initiate a dissolution process (potentially
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52 subject to the agreement of further actors) only after a no-confidence vote in the government.

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54 ¹⁴ For example, a president may have discretion to trigger an early election only upon the
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56 request of the prime minister.
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3 between presidents with significant and weak influence on the calling of parliamentary
4 elections. We categorize presidents as strong if they have a dissolution powers score of at
5 least 5 (the mid-point of the 0 – 10 scale); weak presidents are categorized as those with a
6 dissolution power score smaller than 5. For both categories of presidential power, table 1
7 reports the mean vote and seat share of the PM's party when the government is, and is not,
8 allied to the president together with difference-of-means tests.
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16 The upper half of the table focusses on presidents with strong dissolution powers and
17 shows that incumbents who are allied to the president perform better than their peers who
18 lack an alliance to the president: the vote share bonus for the PM's party is around 9
19 percentage points, the seat share bonus is 10 per cent. These differences are large and
20 statistically significant (p -value = 0.00). The lower half of the table focusses on presidents
21 with weak influence on parliamentary dissolution and suggests that the allies of these
22 presidents do not fare any better than their peers who lack such an alliance – in fact, the mean
23 vote and seat shares suggest that they fare slightly worse than their peers, although the
24 difference-of-means tests do not reach conventional levels of statistical significance. These
25 patterns are consistent with our hypothesis. Presidential allies on average outperform their
26 peers in elections when presidents can exert significant influence on the timing of the polls
27 and not otherwise.¹⁵
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50 ¹⁵ As noted above, we include *regular* and *early* elections in the analysis, because prime
51 ministers who are allied to a president with extensive dissolution powers can be expected to
52 outperform their peers in both types of elections. Evidence that this expectation is borne out
53 by the data is available in SI 2.
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Table 1: Presidents and Prime Ministers' Electoral Performance

	<i>N</i>	No alliance to president	<i>N</i>	Alliance to president	Difference- of-means	<i>p</i> -value
Strong president (dissolution powers ≥ 5)						
PM vote share	59	27.84	77	36.65	8.81	0.00
PM seat share	59	30.56	77	40.70	10.14	0.00
Weak president (dissolution powers < 5)						
PM vote share	33	25.76	20	24.95	-0.81	0.81
PM seat share	33	26.60	20	26.08	-0.52	0.89

Note: PM denotes prime minister. Missing data on party affiliation reduces the number of observations to 189.

While these differences are suggestive, testing our hypothesis requires that we contrast the two conditional effects of interest – the effect on a government's electoral performance of being allied to a president with strong as opposed to weak influence over legislative dissolution – in a multivariate regression framework, taking account of confounding factors, which may influence a PM's electoral success. These confounding factors include a PM's vote and seat share in the previous election (the lagged dependent variable) because parties with an extensive electoral base, which win large vote and seat shares in one election are likely to remain large in the next election (*PM vote share (lagged)*, *PM seat share (lagged)*). We also take account of any potential effects of *semi-presidentialism* (i.e., direct presidential elections). Semi-presidentialism may depress a PM's electoral performance when a conflict between a governing party's legislative and presidential electoral mandates engenders inefficiencies in the government's policy process (Samuels & Shugart, 2010). To control for the potential coattail effects of direct presidential elections, we include a measure of the presidential election's proximity to the parliamentary election (*Proximity to pres. election*, 1 = presidential election held within 180 days before or after the legislative election, otherwise 0),¹⁶ and its interaction with direct presidential

¹⁶ This operationalization reflects Stoll's (2015) finding that presidential elections held *before* and *after* legislative elections have coattail effects.

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3 elections (*SP*Proximity to pres. election*). Presidential coattails may benefit or hinder the
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5 governing party or coalition depending on the performance of its candidate in direct
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7 presidential elections. Economic performance has been shown to affect the electoral
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9 performance of incumbent PMs and we control for the effect of *GDP growth (annual) 6*
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11 *months lagged*. Finally, the policy challenges faced by governments vary significantly over
12
13 time. To account for this changing context, which affects the electoral success of
14
15 governments, we include *decade* indicators in the analysis.¹⁷
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19 To contrast the effect on a government's electoral performance of being allied to a
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21 president with strong as opposed to weak influence over legislative dissolution, we split our
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23 observations into cases observed under high and low levels of presidential dissolution power,
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25 using the mid-point (5) of the 10-point presidential dissolution powers scale, as above.¹⁸ The
26
27 two dependent variables – the PM party's vote share (models 1 and 2) and seat share (models
28
29 3 and 4) – are modeled using OLS regression, with country-clustered standard errors. The
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31 results are nearly identical when these models are specified as multilevel regressions with
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33 country-level random intercepts (analysis available in table SI 3).
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37 Table 2 reports the results and shows that governments, which are allied to a president
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39 with strong influence on parliamentary dissolution, achieve vote and seat share bonuses of
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41 just over five per cent compared to their peers who do not have political ties with the
42
43 president. PMs allied to weaker presidents fail to realize a significant electoral advantage.
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46 ¹⁷ We examine the robustness of this model's results to a series of alternative specifications
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48 and to the addition of a wide range of additional controls (see discussion of robustness
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50 below).
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53 ¹⁸ Below we present an additional analysis that pools the data and examines the conditional
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55 effect of an alliance to the president on a PM's electoral performance across the full range of
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57 presidential dissolution powers.
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These results lend support our hypothesis and are consistent with the descriptive evidence reported in table 1: Only extensive parliamentary dissolution powers appear to enable presidents to influence election timing for the benefit of their political allies.

Table 2: PM Electoral Success (OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PM vote share		PM seat share	
	Weak President	Strong President	Weak President	Strong President
Alliance to president	2.21 (3.48)	5.14*** (1.22)	3.33 (4.56)	5.14*** (1.51)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.31* (0.17)	0.70*** (0.07)		
PM seat share (lagged)			0.30 (0.27)	0.61*** (0.13)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.16** (4.23)	-0.64 (1.81)	-9.19 (8.04)	0.07 (2.74)
Proximity pres. election	-1.77 (3.66)	3.57 (3.01)	-3.23 (3.68)	7.82 (7.59)
SP*Prox. pres. election	8.81 (5.68)	-0.16 (3.68)	15.80* (7.89)	-3.60 (7.97)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.01 (0.48)	0.24 (0.23)	0.03 (0.68)	0.25 (0.33)
Constant	19.67*** (5.74)	1.06 (2.13)	18.43 (11.45)	2.94 (3.69)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	52	118	52	118
R-squared	0.50	0.63	0.38	0.56

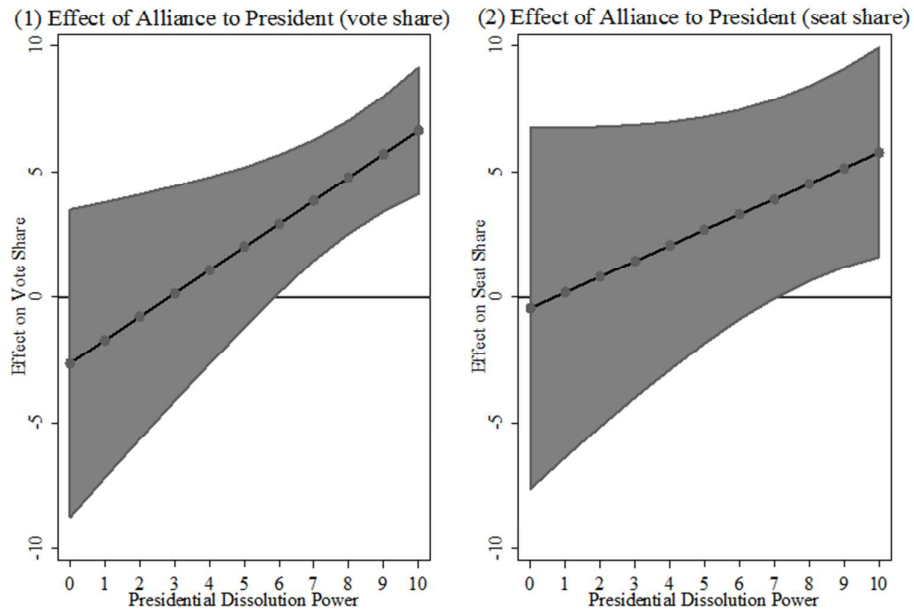
Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

All control variables have the anticipated effects. PMs who lead parties that were large in the previous election (in terms of vote or seat share) are likely to continue to perform better electorally than their peers who lead smaller parties. Semi-presidentialism tends to have a negative sign, but the effect is most often not precisely estimated. Presidential coattails, which can both help or harm the electoral fortunes of the PM's party depending on the performance of its presidential candidate, have no consistent effect overall. Growth is

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3 always positively signed, which indicates that it tends to benefit the electoral performance of
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5 the incumbent PM, but this effect falls short of conventional levels of statistical significance.
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8 To shed further light on the conditional effect of an alliance to the president *at all*
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10 *levels of presidential dissolution power*, we pool the data across the full range of dissolution
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12 powers and analyze the electoral performance of PMs in a single (rather than a split-sample)
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14 model, which includes the interaction of presidential dissolution powers (measured on the 10-
15
16 point scale) and alliance to the president (*Alliance to pres.*Pres. diss. power*), the two
17
18 constitutive terms of the interaction and all of the control variables in the main models that
19
20 we present in table 2. As before, we estimate this model for both of our dependent variables,
21
22 PM vote and seat share (results reported in table 3, appendix 3). Based on this analysis, figure
23
24 1 plots the marginal effect of a cabinet's alliance to the president on a PM's electoral
25
26 performance, across the full range of variation in presidential dissolution power. Panel 1
27
28 focusses on the PM party's vote share, panel 2 on its seat share. Both panels show that the
29
30 effect of leading a cabinet that is allied to the president is strongly positive and statistically
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32 significant only at high levels of presidential dissolution power, as anticipated. This effect
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34 weakens as presidential powers diminish and becomes negative (though not statistically
35
36 significant) at very low levels of presidential dissolution power, when an alliance with the
37
38 president simply represents the inclusion of an additional party in the cabinet. This matches
39
40 the expectations summarized in our hypothesis precisely. An examination of the conditional
41
42 effect of presidential dissolution powers yields equivalent results: Increasing the
43
44 constitutional assembly dissolution power of a president from its minimum value, 0, to its
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46 maximum of 10 significantly raises the predicted vote share of a PM only when the cabinet is
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48 allied to the president (by 7 per cent, from 28 per cent to 35 per cent). Absent an alliance to
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50 the president, the same increase in presidential dissolution power leaves the PM party's
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52 predicted vote share essentially unaltered at around 28 per cent.
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Figure 1: Marginal Effect of Alliance to President across the Full Range of Presidential
Dissolution Powers



Note: The figure displays the marginal effect of leading a cabinet that is allied to the president (with 95% confidence intervals) on a PM's electoral performance in terms of vote share (panel 1) and seat share (panel 2) while varying presidential dissolution power. Semi-presidentialism and proximity to presidential election are held constant at their mode, other control variables at their mean.

Robustness

To assess the robustness of these results, we proceed in five steps. First, we omit the decade indicators to establish that the results of our main models (cf. table 2) do not change substantially and are not driven by the temporal trend (table SI 4).

Second, we examine how far the basic effect that we uncover is robust to the addition of a broad range of further controls (singly and jointly). These controls include additional measures of economic performance (*inflation 6 months lagged*, *unemployment 6 months lagged*), *single party government*, which may facilitate government co-operation with the president, *majoritarian electoral system*, which may correlate with greater vote and seat shares for the incumbent PM, parliamentary fragmentation (*effective number of parties*), which may reduce the PM's seat and vote share, *PM dissolution power*, which may give incumbent PMs a degree of direct influence the timing of elections, *other presidential powers*, which captures additional legislative or cabinet-related constitutional powers of presidents that may influence the performance and therefore the electoral fate of the government, and the *age of democracy*, because older democracies tend to have less volatile electorates, which may increase the vote and seat share of incumbent PMs (tables SI 5-8).

Third, we address alternative ways of coding technical governments and some non-party presidents. It is possible to disagree about the coding of cases in which the president co-exists with a government that is technical or largely non-partisan. Some of the literature on cabinet formation sees these cabinets as indicative of the ability of prime ministers to shape ministerial selection independently of his or her party's preferences (Costa Lobo, 2005). However, other work attributes the appointment of such governments to presidential influence (Amorim Neto & Strøm, 2006; Tavits, 2009). We address this concern by performing an additional analysis in which we drop these ambiguous cases from the sample instead of coding them as cases in which the government is not allied to the president, and re-

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3 estimate our main models (cf. table 2; results available in table SI 9). Additionally, different
4 coding decisions can reasonably be applied to a small group of non-party presidents, who
5 were elected with the support of the governing party or coalition, and may therefore have the
6 interest of that government at heart. These presidents can plausibly be viewed as allied to the
7 government by virtue of their electoral alliance, even though they have no party affiliation.
8 We implement this alternative coding in table SI 10 and re-run the main models presented in
9 our paper (cf. table 2).
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18 Fourth, we restrict the definition of cabinets allied to the president to include only
19 those cases in which the PM shares the president's party affiliation (i.e., excluding cases in
20 which the presidential party is a minor coalition partner in government), and estimate our
21 main models again (cf. table 2; results available in table SI 11).
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27 Our main finding is robust across all of these alternative specifications: PMs who lead
28 cabinets that are allied to a president with significant constitutional influence on assembly
29 dissolution realize a sizable incumbency advantage (measured in terms of votes and seats).
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34 Fifth, we examine the plausibility of two alternatives to the account that we propose
35 and explore whether presidents affect the electoral performance of PMs, *not because of their*
36 *dissolution powers*, but because of their other constitutional powers or the presidential mode
37 of election, which make them consequential political actors in the political system with a
38 strong motivation to assert themselves. We re-estimate our interacted model (cf. table 3,
39 appendix 3) to test these expectations. Table SI 12 explores whether cabinets that are allied to
40 presidents with *constitutional powers other than the power of assembly dissolution* fare better
41 electorally than those PMs who have no such alliance (figure SI 1 presents the corresponding
42 marginal effects). Table SI 13 probes whether cabinets that are allied to *popularly elected*
43 presidents fare better electorally than their peers without such an alliance (figure SI 2 reports
44 the corresponding marginal effects). Both of these additional tests yield null results.
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3 Taken together, these results suggest that European presidents with significant
4 influence on parliamentary dissolution (i.e., those with a dissolution powers score of 5 or
5 more) affect legislative election outcomes. Constitutional powers over parliamentary
6 dissolution give presidents the opportunity to influence the timing elections for the benefit
7 their allies in government, for instance by enabling them to take advantage of waves of public
8 support and periods of strong economic performance. PMs who are supported by presidents
9 invested with such powers realize an average incumbency advantage of around five per cent
10 in terms of vote and seat share.
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20 These findings do not imply that presidents can *always* use their influence on early
21 election calling to the advantage of their allies in *any* government. Timing an early election is
22 a decision fraught with uncertainty, which carries the risk that the president's allies might be
23 defeated. Miscalculation is always possible as the French President Jaques Chirac discovered
24 in 1997, when he called an early assembly election designed to aid his allies – the right-wing
25 cabinet under Prime Minister Alain Juppé – that resulted in Juppé's defeat (Hainsworth,
26 1998). As this example illustrates, not all governments are able to achieve sufficiently strong
27 policy performance and a large enough public opinion poll lead to benefit from strategic
28 election timing by the president. Both electoral uncertainty and underlying differences in
29 government competence and popularity explain why we do not observe early elections more
30 frequently.
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47 **Conclusions**

48 This paper offers the first account of how European presidential heads of state influence
49 election calling and the electoral performance of PMs. Presidents with significant
50 constitutional powers to influence election timing can condition the timing and circumstances
51 of the voters' reckoning to the benefit of their political allies. We show that the resulting
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3 average electoral advantage for PMs who are allied to a powerful president is sizable and
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5 amounts to around five per cent of the parliamentary votes. In many instances, this bonus is
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7 larger than the average vote share margin by which parliamentary elections are won in the
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9 countries that we study.

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12 These findings have implications for three areas of importance in comparative
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14 politics. First, they contribute to a fuller understanding of the political importance of
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16 presidential dissolution powers in the growing literature on presidential activism. While much
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18 of this work has focused on presidential influence in relation to government formation,
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20 composition and termination, we take a first step in mapping how presidents use their
21
22 assembly dissolution powers to affect parliamentary election results.

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26 Second, our paper lays the foundations for a better and more accurate understanding
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28 of the institution of flexible election timing in parliamentary democracies and complements
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30 the extensive political economy literature on opportunistic election calling. A shared
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32 assumption in that literature is that discretion to dissolve the assembly invariably lies in the
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34 hands of incumbent governments in parliamentary democracies. This assumption, we show,
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36 is often mistaken. Instead, parliamentary democracies with presidential heads of state
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38 typically give these actors a role in the momentous decision to dissolve the assembly.
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40 Presidential powers to dissolve parliament and presidents' political motivations are therefore
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42 likely to be important omitted variables in comparative work that seeks to account for the
43
44 timing of early elections in parliamentary democracies.

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48 Third, our study opens up new ways of thinking about the electoral accountability of
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50 incumbent governments in European democracies. Our finding that presidents condition the
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52 electoral success of their allies in government suggests that they may be able to moderate the
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54 strength of the economic vote and accountability for other aspects of government
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56 performance. Presidential dissolution powers have remained unexplored in the literature on
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3 performance voting, but they give presidents the opportunity to influence under which
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5 conditions governments are held accountable by voters, which is likely to shape the outcome
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7 of electoral accountability. The political consequences of presidential powers to call early
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9 elections, then, may be comparable to those of clarity of responsibility, which the extant
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11 literature sees as a main mediating factor that conditions the strength of the economic vote
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13 and electoral accountability in general (Powell & Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 2000; Hobolt et
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15 al., 2013).
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Appendix 1: Data Sources

Variable	Source
<i>Main Paper</i>	
Government data	Schleiter & Morgan-Jones (2009), augmented using Andersson, Bergman & Ersson (2012), <i>The European Representative Democracy Data Archive</i> (www.erdda.se); Keesings; EJPR and country specific sources.
Alliance to president	Based on government data and presidential party affiliation, recorded by the authors using Keesings; EJPR and country specific sources; LexisNexis.
PM party vote share, PM party seat share	Parliamentary Democracy Data Archive; Andersson, Bergman & Ersson (2012). <i>The European Representative Democracy Data Archive</i> (www.erdda.se); augmented using http://www.parties-and-elections.eu/countries.html as well as country specific sources.
Presidential dissolution powers	Goplerud & Schleiter (2016).
GDP growth	Annual data. Maddison Project Database. Bolt & van Zanden (2013). The First Update of the Maddison Project; Re-Estimating Growth Before 1820. <i>Maddison Project Working Paper 4</i> .
Semi-presidentialism	International Constitutional Law Project (http://www.servat.unibe.ch/icl/) as well as country specific sources.
Proximity to presidential election	Presidential and parliamentary election dates from Schleiter and Morgan-Jones (2009), augmented using Keesings; EJPR; LexisNexis and country specific sources.
<i>Supplementary Information (Robustness Checks)</i>	
Inflation (6m lagged)	Annual data. Eurostat, OECD.
Unemployment (6m lagged)	Annual data. OECD Annual Labor Force Statistics, augmented using Labour Statistics Yearbooks, and unemployment data series of the World Bank and IMF (World Economic Outlook).

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Single party government	Indicator (1, otherwise=0). Based on sources of government data.
Majoritarian electoral system	Indicator (1, otherwise=0). Bormann & Golder (2013).
Effective number of parties	Gallagher & Mitchell (2008), augmented using Golder (2005) and calculations by the authors.
PM dissolution power	Goplerud & Schleiter (2016).
Other presidential powers	Total legislative and cabinet-related presidential powers score minus dissolution powers as recorded by Shugart & Carey (1992). Sources: Shugart and Carey (1992), augmented using Fortin (2013); missing cases were coded by the authors including Germany, Italy, Greece (1975, 1986), and Finland (1995, 1999).
Age of democracy	Polity IV Project, polity2 score, http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm .

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2
3 **Appendix 2: Presidential Dissolution Powers**
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Country	Presidential Dissolution Powers
Austria	10
Czech Republic (1992)	3.17
Czech Republic (2009)	3.17
Estonia	5
Finland (1919)	10
Finland (1991)	4.75
France (1958)	9.03
Germany	2.50
Greece (1975)	9.50
Greece (1986)	2.50
Hungary (1989)	2.48
Hungary (2011)	4.78
Iceland	10
Ireland	5
Italy	9.03
Latvia	5
Lithuania	2.38
Poland (1989)	5.23
Poland (1992)	5.23
Poland (1997)	4.75
Portugal (1976)	9.50
Portugal (1982)	8.10
Romania	2.02
Slovakia (1992)	2.38
Slovakia (1999)	3.09
Slovenia	0

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Data source: Goplerud and Schleiter (2016).

Appendix 3: Interacted Model

The analysis reported in table 3 sheds further light on the interaction between presidential dissolution powers and an alliance to the president in our main models (cf. table 2, main paper). Instead of splitting the sample into governments that work with presidents who have greater or lesser influence on election calling, this analysis pools cases at all levels of presidential dissolution power and includes the interaction between *presidential dissolution power* and a cabinet's status as *allied to the president*, as well as all constitutive terms of the interaction as explanatory variables. Table 3 reports the regression results. Figure 1 (main paper) presents the corresponding marginal effects plots visualizing the interactive effects. As anticipated, the plots show that PMs only reap an electoral advantage when they are allied to a president with extensive dissolution powers.

Table 3: PM electoral success (pooled model with interaction term, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)
	PM vote share	PM seat share
Presidential dissolution power	-0.16 (0.34)	0.23 (0.44)
Alliance to president	-2.32 (2.93)	-0.31 (3.45)
Alliance to pres.*Pres. diss. power	0.93** (0.34)	0.67 (0.42)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.66*** (0.08)	
PM seat share (lagged)		0.56*** (0.13)
Semi-presidentialism	-3.40 (2.00)	-2.33 (2.78)
Proximity to presidential election	-0.58 (3.00)	1.16 (5.25)
SP*Proximity to pres. election	5.16 (3.36)	5.91 (5.69)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.08 (0.24)	0.05 (0.36)
Constant	6.21* (3.21)	5.47 (4.76)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	170	170
R-squared	0.57	0.49

Note: SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients; country-clustered standard errors in parentheses; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

Supplementary Information

SI 1: Match between Theory and Cases

This section provides additional evidence to probe the realism of our main theoretical expectation - that presidents make use of their dissolution powers to promote the electoral fortunes of their political allies in government. We proceed in two steps. First, we examine whether presidents actually make use their constitutional dissolution powers by presenting difference-of-means tests of the frequency of early elections under presidents with extensive assembly dissolution powers compared to presidents who lack such powers. Second, we expand on the anecdotal examples given in the introduction to the main paper by reviewing the case oriented literature, which extensively documents the strategic use of parliamentary dissolution by presidents for partisan political benefit.

Do presidents who are endowed with extensive constitutional influence on parliamentary dissolution make use of that influence to call or permit early elections? In table SI 1 below, we use our data to examine this question. The table shows that early elections are more frequent under presidents with extensive dissolution powers than under their constitutionally weaker peers. When presidents have strong assembly dissolution powers (dissolution powers ≥ 5), early elections account for 45 per cent of all elections, whereas political systems in which presidents have only weak influence on assembly dissolution feature a significantly lower frequency of early elections of just 28 per cent (p -value = 0.03).

Table SI 1: Share of early elections by presidential dissolution power

	<i>N</i>	Weak president (dissolution powers < 5)	<i>N</i>	Strong president (dissolution powers ≥ 5)	Difference- of-means	<i>p</i> -value
Early Elections (Share)	54	0.28	136	0.45	0.17	0.03

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How far, then, are these early elections used strategically by presidents to promote the electoral interests of their political allies as our theoretical discussion in the main paper suggests? The case oriented secondary literature provides extensive anecdotal evidence, which speaks to this question. It documents that European presidents employ their dissolution powers to (i) advantage governing parties allied to the president, (ii) disadvantage governing parties that oppose the president, and (iii) promote the electoral interests of the presidential party. We review these three strategic uses of presidential dissolution powers in turn.

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Studies by country experts give numerous examples of presidential choices to permit early elections that *favour incumbents to which presidents are politically allied*. For instance, the Irish constitution gives the president discretion in responding to prime ministerial requests for dissolution when the government that has “ceased to retain the support of a majority” (Article 13.2.2).¹ This discretion enables presidents to veto early elections if the president concludes that the prime minister retains the support of the assembly. Irish presidents can therefore impose political restrictions on the prime minister’s ability to call early elections. In 1944, president Hyde (Fianna Fáil) established a precedent by using this discretion for partisan advantage when, after a defeat on a minor issue, his co-partisan, prime minister de Valera requested a dissolution. President and prime minister agreed that this was situation, in which the president could have refused dissolution, but president Hyde agreed to the pre-term dissolution and de Valera was returned to office (Gallagher, 1999, p.108). Subsequent Fianna Fáil presidents have typically followed this precedent and granted their co-partisans’ requests to call early elections. This has been to the electoral advantage of Fianna Fáil premiers: Prime

¹ As Gallagher (1999, p. 108) notes, the article “does not elaborate on precisely how the question of whether the Taoiseach has ceased to retain the support of the Dáil is to be tested, nor does it spell out when and why a president might decide to refuse a dissolution to such a Taoiseach.”

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3 ministers Lemass (in 1961), Lynch (1969) and Haughey (1989) were all given access to early
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5 elections by a co-partisan Fianna Fáil president, which successfully secured their return to
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7 office (Gallagher, 1999; Mitchell, 2000). Italian presidents, who are constitutionally
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9 empowered to call early elections unilaterally, have equally allowed their co-partisan prime
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11 ministers to go to the polls early when it was electorally opportune (Verzichelli, 2003, pp.
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13 456-57). President Giovanni Leone (a Christian Democrat), for instance, permitted early
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15 elections after the collapse of governments lead by Christian Democratic Prime Ministers
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17 Andreotti in 1972 and Moro in 1975. In both instances, the Christian Democratic Party
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19 returned to government and continued to hold the premiership (Verzichelli, 2000, p. 455).
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21 The Finnish president Kekkonen used the power of assembly dissolution in 1962, 1972 and
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23 1975 (Arter, 1999, p. 58; Nousiainen, 2000, pp. 290-291) to harness “the three main parties
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25 of the centre-left (the Communist, Social Democrats and Centre) into a durable Presidential
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27 majorité” (Arter, 1981, p. 221). In 1962, the election call enabled his party to convert a single
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29 party minority government into a majority coalition government, and the early election of
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31 1972 resolved a deadlock within the presidential coalition over incomes policy (Arter, 1981,
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33 p. 230, Nousiainen, 2000, pp. 290-291). French presidents have also made extensive use of
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35 strategic election calling for partisan benefit in 1962, 1968, 1981 and 1997. The 1962 and
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37 1968 elections enabled the Gaullists and their allies to win parliamentary majorities
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39 supporting the president. In 1981, parliamentary dissolution by President Mitterrand (a
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41 Socialist) secured control of the assembly by his party, three years after its electoral defeat in
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43 the previous legislative elections. Only President Chirac miscalculated when he called early
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45 elections in 1997, as a result of which the parties composing the presidential majority lost
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47 control of the government (Thiébaud, 2000). This case based evidence is consistent with our
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49 expectation that presidents employ their assembly dissolution powers for partisan gain so that
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51 prime ministers who are allied to such presidents fare better on average in elections, than
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53 their peers who lack such an alliance.
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3 Equally well documented is the strategic use of presidential assembly dissolution
4 powers *to disadvantage governing parties opposed by the president*. For example, the
5 Portuguese president Sampaio (a Socialist) dissolved parliament in 2004, toppling a centre-
6 right coalition led by prime minister Santana Lopes, which had become increasingly
7 unpopular. This gave the president's Socialist Party the opportunity to capitalize on the
8 popularity of its new leader, José Sócrates. In the elections that followed, the prime minister's
9 party sustained heavy electoral losses while the Socialists secured an absolute majority in
10 parliament (Magone, 2005, 2006). A president's refusal to dissolve parliament in
11 circumstances that would favour the opposition can be similarly damaging: In 1994, for
12 instance, Italy's President Scalfaro (at the time a member of the centre-left PPI party, a
13 successor to the Christian Democrats that later merged into the party La Margherita) refused
14 a request for parliamentary dissolution by the right-wing prime minister Berlusconi. As
15 Grimaldi (2011, p. 112) notes, "[t]his crisis was particularly severe because of the vehemence
16 of the outgoing Prime Minister, who placed considerable pressure on the head of state to
17 dissolve the legislature that had begun just 7 months earlier" (see also Pasquino, 1999, pp.
18 407-8). In contrast, president Scalfaro did agree to early elections just two years later, in
19 1996, when a successful alliance of centre-left parties led the cabinet (Verzichelli, 2000, p.
20 464). The Irish president, too, has used the dissolution power to prevent the opposition from
21 accessing early elections. In November 1994, following the failure of a Fianna Fáil-led
22 coalition government, President Robinson, who had been a member of the Labour Party
23 before becoming president, sought legal advice regarding her constitutional power to refuse a
24 request for a dissolution, if one were made.² "The Taoiseach [prime minister], accordingly,
25 resigned but did not seek a dissolution, which paved the way for the first ever change of
26 government without an election, as the Labour party linked up with two former opposition
27 parties to form a new coalition" (Gallagher, 1999, pp. 117-118). This case based evidence
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58 ² Hogan, *Irish Times*, 21 Oct. 1997.
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3 suggests that the theoretical expectation underpinning our analysis accurately reflects the
4 observations of country experts: Premiers who lead governments that are not allied to a
5 president with extensive assembly dissolution powers can be expected to fare worse
6 electorally than their peers who benefit from such an alliance.
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11 Finally, the case oriented literature documents the strategic use of presidential
12 assembly dissolution powers *to promote the electoral interests of the presidential party*. For
13 instance, in 1985, seven months before the end of the Portuguese president Eanes's second
14 term in office, the coalition government led by the socialist prime minister Soares collapsed.
15 For Eanes, who decided to enter parliamentary politics through the PRD, a new party that he
16 had created, the unpopularity of the governing Socialist Party created an opportunity. Eanes
17 seized the opportunity and called early elections against the express wish of the prime
18 minister. In the ensuing legislative race the president's new party, PRD, won as much as 17
19 per cent of the votes (Costa Lobo, 2001, pp. 190-192). In a similar manner, the Polish
20 president Wałęsa attempted to take advantage of the 1993 defeat of Suckocka's coalition
21 government and called early elections in order to shore up his parliamentary support. He
22 hoped that his newly formed presidential alliance grouping, the BBWR (a non-party reform
23 block), would profit from a change in the electoral law, which reduced the degree of
24 proportionality and favoured larger parties and groupings. In the event, however, this
25 strategic dissolution backfired and the new block only won sixteen seats providing Wałęsa
26 with minimal parliamentary support (van der Meer Krok-Paszowska, 1999, pp. 182-183).
27 The Latvian president Zatlers initiated parliamentary dissolution with similar goals, albeit in
28 a more restrictive constitutional context. Article 48 of the Latvian constitution enables the
29 president to propose early elections, which then requires ratification by a national
30 referendum.³ Zatlers made use of this option in 2011, when it became clear that the major
31 parliamentary parties were not prepared to support his campaign to win re-election to the
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58 ³ If the referendum fails, the president is removed from office.
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3 presidency. Exploiting the unpopularity of his parliamentary opponents, Zatlars instigated a
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5 referendum to secure the dissolution of parliament, which was endorsed with over 94 per cent
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7 of the votes cast. He then contested the ensuing 2011 parliamentary elections with the newly
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9 founded Zatlars Reform Party, which secured 22 per cent of the parliamentary seats and
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11 entered the next coalition government (Ikstens, 2012).
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14 In sum, the evidence provided by the case oriented literature suggests that our main
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16 theoretical expectation is realistic: European presidents use their parliamentary dissolution
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18 powers for the benefit of their political allies, precisely as the theory developed in the main
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20 text suggests.
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SI 2: Prime Ministers' Performance in Early and Regular Elections

Prime ministers who are allied to a president with extensive dissolution powers can be expected to outperform their peers in *regular* and *early* elections for two reasons. First, incumbents who can access to early elections with presidential support under favourable conditions are by definition less likely to face regular elections once their popularity advantage has been eroded. Second, incumbents who are confident of their ability to perform well in regular elections are more likely to be able to complete their full term if they benefit from an alliance to a president with extensive dissolution powers. Table SI 2 below tests this expectation. As anticipated, presidential allies outperform their peers in early and regular elections when presidents can exert significant influence on the timing of the polls.

Table SI 2: Presidents and Prime Ministers' Electoral Performance

	<i>N</i>	No alliance to president	<i>N</i>	Alliance to president	Difference- of-means	<i>p</i> -value
Restricted sample, early elections						
Strong president (dissolution powers ≥ 5)						
PM vote share	25	25.90	36	38.10	12.20	0.00
PM seat share	25	28.92	36	41.91	12.99	0.00
Weak president (dissolution powers < 5)						
PM vote share	11	26.56	3	35.47	8.90	0.12
PM seat share	11	30.22	3	35.70	5.47	0.38
Restricted sample, regular elections						
Strong president (dissolution powers ≥ 5)						
PM vote share	32	29.11	35	36.82	7.71	0.00
PM seat share	32	31.59	35	41.11	9.52	0.00
Weak president (dissolution powers < 5)						
PM vote share	22	25.35	17	23.09	-2.26	0.54
PM seat share	22	24.78	17	24.38	-0.40	0.92

Note: PM denotes prime minister. Eight elections are classified as technical, i.e. triggered by the death of a PM or other non-political event and therefore count neither as called early for political reasons nor as regular. Missing data on party affiliation reduces the number of observations to 181.

SI 3: Specification of the Main Models as Multi-Level Models with Random, Country-Level Intercepts

Table SI 3 replicates our main analysis (cf. table 2, main paper), using a multi-level model with random, country-level intercepts and reports maximum likelihood estimates of the regression coefficients as well as the variance components.

Table SI 3: PM electoral success (multilevel random intercept model)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PM vote share		PM seat share	
	Weak President	Strong President	Weak President	Strong President
Alliance to President	2.21 (2.77)	5.14*** (1.56)	3.33 (3.64)	5.14*** (1.87)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.31** (0.14)	0.70*** (0.06)		
PM seat share (lagged)			0.30* (0.15)	0.61*** (0.07)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.16*** (3.30)	-0.64 (1.61)	-9.19** (4.66)	0.07 (1.94)
Proximity to pres. election	-1.77 (3.70)	3.57 (2.61)	-3.23 (4.98)	7.82** (3.12)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	8.81 (6.39)	-0.16 (4.11)	15.80* (8.71)	-3.60 (4.90)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.01 (0.33)	0.24 (0.22)	0.03 (0.45)	0.25 (0.27)
Constant	19.67*** (5.29)	1.06 (2.95)	18.43** (7.33)	2.94 (3.52)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Variance components				
Country level	0.00 (6.12)	0.00 (2.73)	0.00 (3.52)	0.00 (.)
Government level	8.24*** (0.81)	7.35*** (0.48)	11.22*** (1.10)	8.76*** (0.57)
<i>N</i>	52	118	52	118

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients; standard errors in parentheses; ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

The results are virtually identical to those reported in the main paper – while PMs who are politically allied to a president with strong dissolution powers are able to realize a vote and seat share bonus of just over five percent, those who are allied to presidents with weaker

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3 dissolution powers enjoy no such benefits. Note that only the government-level variance
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5 component is always statistically significant, suggesting that there is not sufficient variance in
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7 the data at the country level to support a multi-level modelling approach.
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SI 4: Robustness Checks

We examine the robustness of the findings reported in the main paper in five steps.

Omitting the decade indicators

First, we omit the decade indicators to establish that the results of our main models (cf. table 2) do not change substantially and are not driven by the temporal trend. Table SI 4 reports the results of the re-estimation dropping the decade dummies, which indicate that our main conclusion is robust. Only governments allied to presidents with extensive dissolution powers realize vote and seat share bonuses. The magnitude of these bonuses is estimated at around 5.5 percentage points, slightly larger than in our main models. The variance explained changes only very slightly.

Table SI 4: PM electoral success (no decade indicators, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PM vote share		PM seat share	
	Weak President	Strong President	Weak President s	Strong President
Alliance to President	1.86 (2.76)	5.40*** (1.48)	2.77 (3.71)	5.56** (1.77)
PM Vote Share (lagged)	0.34* (0.15)	0.73*** (0.07)		
PM Seat Share (lagged)			0.32 (0.25)	0.64*** (0.12)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.02** (3.41)	-0.41 (2.03)	-8.83 (7.06)	0.32 (2.98)
Proximity to pres. election	-1.86 (3.96)	3.45 (3.44)	-3.75 (4.04)	8.34 (7.65)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	8.26 (5.74)	0.29 (4.22)	15.57* (7.72)	-3.31 (7.97)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.08 (0.43)	0.35 (0.21)	0.02 (0.65)	0.39 (0.27)
Constant	19.67*** (5.71)	2.70 (2.07)	18.41 (11.61)	5.55 (4.38)
<i>N</i>	52	118	52	118
R-squared	0.49	0.60	0.38	0.50

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with country clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

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3 *Additional control variables*
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5 Second, tables SI 5 to SI 8 examine how far our results (cf. table 2, main paper) are robust to
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7 the addition of a broad range of further control variables (both singly and jointly). The
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9 additional controls include supplementary aspects of economic performance (*inflation 6*
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11 *months lagged, unemployment 6 months lagged*), *single party government*, which may
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13 facilitate government co-operation with the president, *majoritarian electoral system*, which
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15 may correlate with greater vote and seat shares for the incumbent PM, parliamentary
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17 fragmentation (*effective number of parties*), which may reduce the PM's seat and vote share,
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19 *PM dissolution power*, which may give incumbent PMs a degree of direct influence the
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21 timing of elections, *other presidential powers*, which captures additional legislative or
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23 cabinet-related constitutional powers of presidents that may influence the performance and
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25 therefore the electoral fate of the government (based on Shugart & Carey's (1992)
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27 presidential powers index), and the *age of democracy*, because older democracies tend to
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29 have less volatile electorates, which may increase the vote and seat share of incumbent PMs.
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34 Tables SI 5 and 6 report the results focussing on PM *vote share* as the dependent
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36 variable, while tables SI 7 and 8 focus on PM *seat share*. To facilitate the presentation of the
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38 results, we group the additional control variables so that tables SI 5 and 7 report the results
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40 for the inclusion of variables that never have a statistically significant effect on either
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42 dependent variable, while tables SI 6 and 8 focus on variables that reach statistical
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44 significance in some of the models. Our central conclusion is robust in all of these additional
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46 analyses.
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Table SI 5: PM electoral success – vote share (additional controls, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Dependent variable: PM vote share								
	Weak President				Strong President			
Alliance to president	2.54 (3.62)	2.22 (3.44)	2.21 (3.48)	2.55 (3.58)	3.90*** (1.05)	5.16*** (1.28)	5.23*** (1.44)	4.09** (1.39)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.36 (0.20)	0.31* (0.15)	0.31* (0.17)	0.35* (0.19)	0.69*** (0.09)	0.70*** (0.08)	0.70*** (0.09)	0.67*** (0.12)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.33** (4.51)	-11.15** (4.31)	-11.16** (4.23)	-11.32** (4.60)	-0.44 (1.50)	-0.69 (1.78)	-0.56 (1.96)	-0.35 (1.76)
Proximity to pres. election	-3.74 (6.71)	-1.78 (3.73)	-1.77 (3.66)	-3.75 (6.78)	2.95 (3.35)	3.50 (3.18)	3.66 (3.29)	2.90 (3.74)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	11.10 (8.10)	8.83 (5.73)	8.81 (5.68)	11.13 (8.10)	-1.16 (4.05)	-0.07 (3.93)	-0.23 (3.83)	-0.98 (4.42)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.16 (0.66)	0.01 (0.49)	0.01 (0.48)	0.16 (0.67)	0.09 (0.27)	0.24 (0.22)	0.24 (0.24)	0.06 (0.27)
Inflation 6m lagged	0.04 (0.08)			0.04 (0.08)	-0.17 (0.20)			-0.19 (0.21)
Single party government		0.09 (3.69)		0.11 (3.91)		0.31 (1.91)		0.88 (1.65)
Majoritarian electoral system			0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)			-0.56 (2.23)	-1.02 (2.57)
Constant	16.69* (8.49)	19.71*** (5.72)	19.67*** (5.74)	16.73* (8.61)	4.29 (3.78)	1.17 (2.31)	1.13 (2.28)	4.98 (4.49)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	52	52	52	52	108	118	118	108
R-squared	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

Table SI 6: PM electoral success – vote share (additional controls, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	Dependent variable: PM vote share											
	Weak President						Strong President					
Alliance to president	1.76 (3.44)	0.65 (2.77)	2.53 (3.15)	2.53 (3.59)	2.27 (3.25)	0.74 (2.88)	5.23*** (1.18)	4.88*** (1.19)	5.15*** (1.16)	5.02*** (1.18)	4.33*** (1.04)	4.73*** (1.21)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.31* (0.15)	0.34** (0.14)	0.34** (0.15)	0.52** (0.17)	0.30* (0.16)	0.45** (0.17)	0.70*** (0.07)	0.69*** (0.09)	0.69*** (0.08)	0.62*** (0.05)	0.66*** (0.06)	0.53*** (0.04)
Semi-presidentialism	-12.01** (4.34)	-9.60** (3.06)	-14.09** (4.39)	-12.86** (4.04)	-12.23** (4.41)	-11.72** (3.95)	-0.54 (1.90)	-0.61 (1.78)	-0.83 (1.90)	-1.00 (1.83)	-0.01 (2.37)	0.79 (2.77)
Proximity pres. election	-0.33 (3.93)	-1.14 (3.65)	0.29 (4.19)	-4.00 (3.98)	-0.46 (4.35)	-1.21 (4.65)	3.53 (2.98)	3.37 (2.96)	3.78 (3.03)	3.37 (3.08)	3.96 (2.65)	3.61 (2.71)
SP*Prox. pres. election	7.11 (5.78)	5.96 (5.80)	7.00 (5.94)	11.17* (6.00)	6.48 (6.08)	5.27 (5.95)	-0.07 (3.65)	-1.64 (3.54)	-0.29 (3.72)	-0.04 (3.71)	-0.40 (3.58)	-1.25 (3.37)
Growth 6m lagged	0.04 (0.49)	0.11 (0.40)	0.11 (0.48)	0.09 (0.46)	0.14 (0.50)	0.25 (0.45)	0.23 (0.26)	0.13 (0.22)	0.25 (0.23)	0.25 (0.23)	0.25 (0.24)	0.04 (0.23)
Age of democracy	0.07 (0.05)					0.05** (0.02)	-0.01 (0.04)					-0.10* (0.05)
Unemp. 6m lagged		-0.86** (0.29)				-0.74* (0.37)		-0.20 (0.25)				-0.50 (0.30)
PM dissolution power			1.32** (0.50)			-0.37 (0.97)			0.14 (0.14)			0.33 (0.27)
Effective n. of parties				2.44** (0.78)		1.71 (1.33)				-0.89 (0.68)		-0.59 (0.52)
Other pres. powers					-1.01 (0.93)	-0.90 (1.00)					-0.91** (0.33)	-1.30** (0.58)
Constant	18.80*** (5.30)	28.24*** (6.62)	17.93*** (4.84)	4.07 (7.59)	23.08** (7.13)	19.04 (10.97)	1.24 (1.84)	3.82 (4.39)	1.27 (2.18)	7.61 (4.87)	4.53* (2.36)	19.48** (6.46)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	52	52	52	52	52	52	118	114	118	118	118	114
R-squared	0.51	0.58	0.54	0.54	0.51	0.61	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.64	0.66

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

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Table SI 7: PM electoral success – seat share (additional controls, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Dependent variable: PM seat share								
	Weak President				Strong President			
Alliance to president	3.85 (4.64)	3.40 (4.51)	3.33 (4.56)	3.93 (4.59)	3.37* (1.60)	5.26*** (1.48)	5.11** (1.69)	3.46* (1.83)
PM seat share (lagged)	0.33 (0.30)	0.27 (0.24)	0.30 (0.27)	0.31 (0.27)	0.59*** (0.15)	0.59*** (0.13)	0.61*** (0.13)	0.56*** (0.14)
Semi-presidentialism	-9.34 (8.43)	-9.12 (8.14)	-9.19 (8.04)	-9.27 (8.54)	0.49 (2.43)	-0.06 (2.69)	0.04 (2.87)	0.27 (2.58)
Proximity to pres. election	-5.52 (6.42)	-3.40 (3.90)	-3.23 (3.68)	-5.71 (6.54)	7.26 (8.07)	7.46 (7.94)	7.77 (7.70)	6.59 (8.56)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	18.64* (9.36)	16.14* (7.89)	15.80* (7.89)	19.01* (9.25)	-4.83 (8.36)	-3.15 (8.41)	-3.55 (8.04)	-3.99 (9.01)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.20 (0.90)	0.04 (0.69)	0.03 (0.68)	0.21 (0.91)	-0.01 (0.42)	0.24 (0.33)	0.25 (0.34)	-0.05 (0.39)
Inflation 6m lagged	0.05 (0.09)			0.05 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.18)			-0.10 (0.19)
Single party government		1.58 (4.03)		1.62 (4.13)		1.44 (3.23)		2.19 (3.15)
Majoritarian electoral system			0.00 (.)	0.00 (.)			0.24 (1.98)	0.50 (2.28)
Constant	14.93 (13.92)	19.03 (11.19)	18.43 (11.45)	15.52 (13.87)	6.57 (4.77)	3.47 (3.76)	2.97 (3.59)	7.70 (4.89)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	52	52	52	52	108	118	118	108
R-squared	0.39	0.38	0.38	0.39	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.57

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

Table SI 8: PM electoral success – seat share (additional controls, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)
	Dependent variable: PM seat share											
	Weak President						Strong President					
Alliance to president	2.64 (4.50)	0.35 (3.75)	3.62 (4.34)	4.02 (4.90)	3.28 (4.14)	-0.41 (3.72)	6.06*** (1.53)	4.08** (1.40)	5.14*** (1.52)	5.01*** (1.21)	4.94*** (1.52)	5.39*** (1.43)
PM seat share (lagged)	0.30 (0.25)	0.40* (0.20)	0.33 (0.25)	0.47 (0.28)	0.29 (0.25)	0.51* (0.26)	0.59*** (0.12)	0.57*** (0.16)	0.61*** (0.14)	0.46* (0.21)	0.60*** (0.13)	0.40* (0.20)
Semi-presidentialism	-10.34 (7.82)	-5.31 (5.65)	-11.84 (8.38)	-10.42 (8.13)	-10.59 (8.17)	-5.53 (6.56)	1.16 (2.69)	0.16 (2.39)	0.07 (2.93)	-0.20 (2.41)	0.24 (2.84)	1.82 (2.59)
Prox. pres. election	-1.16 (3.60)	-2.72 (4.76)	-1.25 (4.00)	-5.31 (3.72)	-1.39 (4.05)	-2.82 (5.25)	7.40 (7.53)	7.37 (7.48)	7.83 (7.84)	7.17 (6.99)	7.91 (7.64)	6.91 (6.83)
SP*Prox. pres. election	13.33 (7.66)	11.50 (7.70)	14.11 (8.07)	18.60** (8.09)	12.33 (8.13)	9.29 (7.74)	-2.72 (7.83)	-5.08 (7.81)	-3.60 (8.16)	-3.18 (7.49)	-3.66 (8.01)	-4.14 (7.18)
Growth 6m lagged	0.07 (0.68)	0.18 (0.55)	0.12 (0.68)	0.07 (0.68)	0.22 (0.70)	0.36 (0.59)	0.15 (0.35)	0.03 (0.35)	0.25 (0.33)	0.27 (0.33)	0.25 (0.33)	-0.10 (0.39)
Age of democracy	0.11 (0.06)					0.12*** (0.03)	-0.06 (0.04)					-0.13* (0.07)
Unemp. 6m lagged		-1.42*** (0.32)				-1.51** (0.49)		-0.45 (0.35)				-0.60 (0.41)
PM dissolution power			1.31** (0.46)			-1.74 (1.41)			0.01 (0.21)			0.43 (0.29)
Effective n. of parties				2.45** (1.08)		2.20 (2.27)				-1.74 (1.46)		-1.25 (1.31)
Other pres. powers					-1.51 (1.00)	-1.75 (1.29)					-0.21 (0.47)	-0.57 (0.51)
Constant	16.95 (10.62)	29.45*** (7.97)	16.14 (10.16)	2.25 (13.65)	22.99 (12.65)	22.34 (16.30)	4.99 (3.36)	9.58 (7.02)	2.95 (3.70)	15.89 (11.68)	3.69 (3.63)	26.56** (11.90)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	52	52	52	52	52	52	118	114	118	118	118	114
R-squared	0.40	0.52	0.41	0.41	0.40	0.57	0.56	0.56	0.56	0.57	0.56	0.59

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

Technical cabinets and non-party presidents

Third, it is possible to disagree about the treatment of cases in which the president co-exists with a technical and largely non-party government, and about the coding of some of the cases in which the president is a non-partisan. We discuss both groups of cases in turn.

Some of the literature on cabinet formation sees technical and largely non-party cabinets as indicative of the ability of prime ministers to shape ministerial selection independently of his or her party's preferences (Costa Lobo, 2005). However, other work attributes the appointment of such governments to presidential influence (Amorim Neto & Strøm, 2006; Tavits, 2009). It might therefore not be appropriate to treat these governments as equivalent to partisan governments that do not include the president's party. For this reason we perform an additional analysis in which we drop these cases from the sample, instead of coding them as cases in which the government is not allied to the president, and re-estimate our main models (cf. table 2). The results are reported in table SI 9 and indicate that our main conclusions are robust in this reduced sample.

In addition it is possible to disagree about the appropriate coding of some cases in which the president has no party affiliation. Our main approach to coding non-party presidents is to record them as not affiliated with the cabinet. To the extent that some non-party presidents are elected with the support of the governing party or coalition, however, they may have the interest of that government at heart. Treating these presidents none the less as non-partisans is a conservative strategy that should make it more difficult to find support for our hypothesis. Alternatively non-party presidents who were elected with the support of the governing party or coalition can be coded as allied to the government by virtue of their electoral alliance, despite the fact that they lack a party affiliation. We implement this alternative coding in Table SI 10 and re-run the main models presented in our paper (cf. table 2). The results indicate that our findings are robust to this alternative way of coding non-party presidents.

Table SI 9: PM electoral success (reduced sample excluding technical governments, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PM vote share		PM seat share	
	Weak President	Strong President	Weak President	Strong President
Alliance to President	2.14 (3.50)	4.99*** (1.12)	3.08 (4.61)	4.85*** (1.50)
PM Vote Share (lagged)	0.25 (0.20)	0.69*** (0.09)		
PM Seat Share (lagged)			0.24 (0.29)	0.58*** (0.15)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.16** (4.25)	-0.64 (1.92)	-9.29 (8.10)	0.16 (2.94)
Proximity to pres. election	-1.88 (3.56)	3.45 (3.03)	-3.44 (3.51)	7.53 (7.56)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	8.90 (5.73)	-0.03 (3.72)	15.76* (8.03)	-3.32 (8.01)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.02 (0.48)	0.23 (0.22)	0.05 (0.68)	0.23 (0.33)
Constant	22.53** (7.39)	1.89 (2.82)	21.53 (12.88)	4.64 (4.91)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	51	116	51	116
R-squared	0.46	0.57	0.35	0.49

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table SI 10: PM electoral success (coding non-party presidents elected with the support of governing parties as allied to the cabinet, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PM vote share		PM seat share	
	Weak President	Strong President	Weak President	Strong President
Alliance to President	4.44 (3.05)	5.22*** (1.27)	6.38 (3.89)	5.28*** (1.60)
PM Vote Share (lagged)	0.24 (0.16)	0.70*** (0.07)		
PM Seat Share (lagged)			0.23 (0.26)	0.60*** (0.14)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.62** (4.15)	-0.64 (1.83)	-9.81 (7.94)	0.09 (2.76)
Proximity to pres. election	-1.58 (3.63)	3.64 (3.02)	-3.20 (3.83)	7.88 (7.57)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	7.17 (4.80)	-1.04 (3.57)	13.39* (7.03)	-4.47 (7.94)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	-0.06 (0.45)	0.25 (0.23)	-0.06 (0.64)	0.26 (0.33)
Constant	20.97*** (5.70)	1.11 (2.13)	19.74 (11.46)	3.04 (3.72)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	52	118	52	118
R-squared	0.52	0.63	0.41	0.56

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with country clustered standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

Narrowed conception of alliance to president

Fourth, table SI 11 examines whether our results are robust if we narrow the conceptualization of an alliance to a president only to those cabinets in which the PM shares the president's party affiliation. A re-estimation of our main models (cf. table 2, main paper) using this narrowed definition indicates that our central finding is robust: PMs who share the party affiliation of strong presidents perform better electorally than their peers who are allied to weaker presidents.

Table SI 11: PM electoral success (narrowed conception of alliance to president, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	PM vote share		PM seat share	
	Weak President	Strong President	Weak President	Strong President
Alliance to president (PM only)	3.27 (3.09)	3.67* (1.72)	4.09 (4.00)	3.26* (1.49)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.29 (0.17)	0.72*** (0.08)		
PM seat share (lagged)			0.29 (0.26)	0.62*** (0.13)
Semi-presidentialism	-11.44** (4.24)	-0.25 (2.13)	-9.27 (8.06)	0.43 (3.01)
Proximity to pres. election	-1.26 (3.90)	3.11 (3.38)	-2.66 (3.85)	7.38 (8.06)
SP*Prox. to pres. election	8.48 (5.55)	1.09 (4.46)	15.19* (7.71)	-2.50 (8.63)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.03 (0.49)	0.32 (0.24)	0.06 (0.69)	0.32 (0.34)
Constant	20.27*** (5.87)	2.13 (2.27)	18.72 (11.65)	4.21 (3.92)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	52	118	52	118
R-squared	0.50	0.61	0.39	0.54

Note: Weak president denotes a dissolution power score smaller than 5, strong presidents have dissolution power scores of 5 or larger, SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with robust, country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Alternative mechanisms

Fifth, we examine the plausibility of two alternatives to the account that we propose. These additional analyses explore whether presidents affect the electoral performance of PMs, *not because of their dissolution powers*, but because of their other constitutional powers or the presidential mode of election, which make them consequential political actors in the political system with a strong motivation to assert themselves. We re-estimate our interacted model (cf. table 3, main paper) to test these expectations, controlling for presidential dissolution powers.

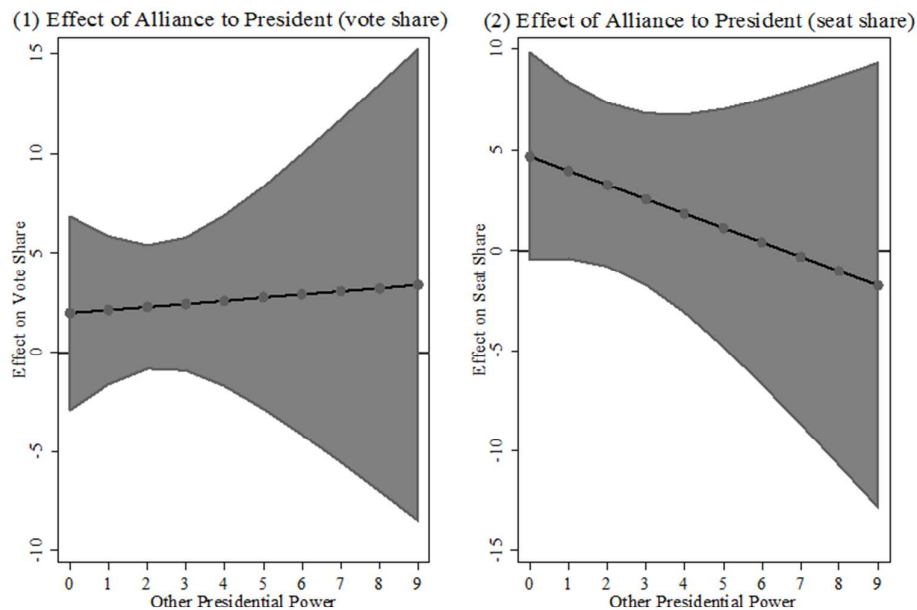
Table SI 12: PM electoral success and other presidential powers (pooled model, OLS regression)

	(1)	(2)
	PM vote share	PM seat share
Other presidential powers	-1.13*** (0.34)	-0.53 (0.41)
Alliance to president	1.98 (2.31)	4.70* (2.44)
Alliance to pres.*Other pres. powers	0.16 (0.80)	-0.71 (0.71)
Presidential dissolution power	0.44 (0.41)	0.66 (0.42)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.62*** (0.09)	
PM seat share (lagged)		0.53*** (0.13)
Semi-presidentialism	-3.15 (2.15)	-2.26 (2.83)
Proximity to presidential election	-0.16 (3.13)	1.60 (5.39)
SP*Proximity to presidential election	3.97 (3.55)	5.07 (5.89)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.09 (0.22)	0.08 (0.33)
Constant	7.86** (3.67)	6.13 (5.33)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	170	170
R-squared	0.58	0.50

Note: SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Table SI 12 explores whether cabinets that are allied to presidents with *constitutional powers other than the power of assembly dissolution* fare better electorally than those PMs who have no such alliance (Figure SI 1 presents the corresponding marginal effects).

Figure SI 1: Marginal effect of alliance to president across the full range of *presidential powers other than assembly dissolution*



Note: The figure displays the marginal effect of leading a cabinet that is allied to the president (with 95% confidence intervals) on a PM's electoral performance in terms of vote share (panel 1) and seat share (panel 2) while varying presidential powers other than the power of assembly dissolution. Semi-presidentialism is held constant at its mode, other control variables at their mean.

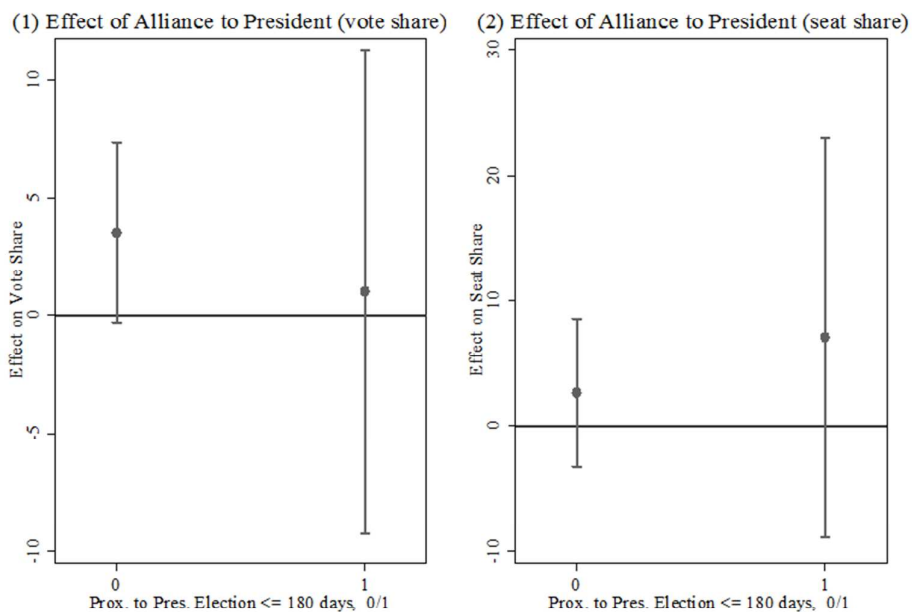
Table SI 13 probes whether cabinets that are allied to *popularly elected* presidents fare better electorally than their peers without such an alliance (see Figure SI 2 for the corresponding marginal effects). The results of these additional analyses indicate that neither of the alternative causal mechanisms accounts for our results: PMs who lead governments that are allied to a popularly elected president or a president with extensive powers other than

parliamentary dissolution powers *perform no better electorally* than their peers who are allied to indirectly elected or constitutionally weaker presidents.

Table SI 13: PM electoral success and popular presidential election (pooled model, OLS regression)

	(1) PM vote share	(2) PM seat share
Semi-presidentialism (SP)	-2.99 (2.40)	-1.02 (3.57)
Alliance to president*SP	-0.77 (2.83)	-2.24 (4.20)
Alliance to president*Proximity	-5.93** (2.28)	-7.36** (2.90)
Alliance to president*SP*Proximity	3.43 (5.96)	11.80 (9.33)
SP*Proximity to pres. election	-6.30** (2.57)	-11.79*** (4.07)
Alliance to president	4.29* (2.40)	4.90 (3.34)
Proximity to presidential election	6.82*** (1.72)	9.85*** (2.62)
Presidential dissolution power	0.34 (0.40)	0.63 (0.45)
PM vote share (lagged)	0.63*** (0.09)	
PM seat share (lagged)		0.55*** (0.13)
Growth (annual) 6m lagged	0.07 (0.26)	0.04 (0.38)
Constant	4.15 (3.58)	3.28 (5.45)
Decade dummies	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	170	170
R-squared	0.57	0.49

Note: SP denotes semi-presidentialism. Table entries are regression coefficients with country-clustered standard errors in parentheses. *** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$. Semi-presidentialism (i.e., the direct election of the president) is not only interacted with alliance to the president, but also with the temporal distance between presidential and parliamentary elections to account for presidential coattails. For this reason, we control for the three-way interaction between alliance to the president, direct election, and the temporal proximity of presidential and parliamentary interactions, as well as all constituent terms of this interaction.

Figure SI 2: Marginal effect of alliance to *popularly elected* president

Note: The figure displays the marginal effect of leading a cabinet that is allied to a popularly elected president (with 95% confidence intervals) on a PM's electoral performance in terms of vote share (panel 1) and seat share (panel 2). Because direct presidential election is also interacted with the proximity of the legislative election to the presidential election in order to take account of potential presidential coattails, both panels display the effect of direct presidential election while varying the proximity between presidential and parliamentary elections from greater than 180 days (Prox. to Pres. Election <= 180 days = 0) to within 180 days (Prox to Pres. Election <= 180 days = 1). Semi-presidentialism is held constant at its mode, other control variables at their mean.

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