



School of Law

# **AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM**

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# American Exceptionalism\*

*Abstract.* Most Americans subscribe to the idea of American Exceptionalism, under which (1) the United States is the freest country in the world, and (2) it owes its freedom to the Framers' Constitution, with its presidential form of government and separation of powers. All of this is a fiction. The Framers' Constitution was one of Congressional government more than of separation of powers, and presidential government is associated with less, not more, political liberty. To show this, I report on an empirical study of presidential versus parliamentary regimes as determinants of Freedom House's rankings of political freedom. I also respond to José Cheibub's argument that the greater political freedom of parliamentary regimes can be attributed to the cycling of presidential and military regimes in Latin America. I show that this can be explained by the greater military spending of presidential regimes.

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# American Exceptionalism

Most Americans subscribe to the idea of “American Exceptionalism.” When polled, 80 percent of respondents report that, because of its history and Constitution, America “has a unique character that makes it the greatest country in the world” (York 2010). For this, one’s thanks go to the Framers, who gave the country a presidential system, with its separation of powers, that secured the blessings of liberty for Americans.

While this is a comforting story, it lacks what in Texas is called the added advantage of truthfulness. The modern presidential system with its separation of powers was an unexpected consequence of the democratization of American politics and not a prominent feature of the Framers’ constitution. The American presidential system was a near-run thing, decided only on day 105 of a 116-day Convention. The delegates debated the selection of the President on 21 different days and took more than 30 votes on the subject. In 16 roll calls they voted on how to select the President. On six of these (once unanimously), they voted for a President appointed by Congress, which would have closely resembled a parliamentary regime. Once they voted 8 to 2 for a president appointed by state legislatures, which would also have greatly weakened the separation of powers. On one thing they were wholly clear: they did not want a President elected by the people. That question was put to them four times, and lost each time (Buckley 2012).

What they agreed to was a Constitution in which the locus of political power would be in the states. Senators would be appointed by state legislators, who would also select presidential electors. The Framers also thought that the choice of president would almost always fall on the House of Representatives, with each state delegation getting one vote, since it seemed very unlikely that candidates who followed George Washington would get a majority of electoral votes. Such a system could and did give rise to sectional conflict, with the states disagreeing amongst themselves over slavery and the tariff. What one wouldn’t have expected to see was the kind of gridlock one sees today in the federal government.

What transformed the Constitution was the rise of democracy and elected senators and presidents. The president became the principal symbol of the nation,

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and the most effective counterpoise to state governments. Not only was he democratically elected, but he was the only person so elected by the entire country. With a legitimacy derived from both the Constitution and the democratic process, the president became the spokesman for the welfare of the nation as a whole. He might thus oppose the will of Congress, and in doing so strengthen the separation of powers.

Whatever one might think of American government, then, one can't blame it on the Framers. Nor is America the freest country in the world, at least on the Index of Economic Freedom put out by the Heritage Foundation. In its 2012 rankings, Heritage lists the United States as "partly free," tenth in the world and well behind countries such as Australia and Canada (Heritage Foundation 2012). Even this might be generous. In the 2012 economic freedom rankings produced by the Cato and Fraser Institutes, the United States comes in at eighteenth, behind Chile, Ireland and Britain as well (Cato Institute 2012). Heritage, Cato and Fraser are all right-wing institutes, but the middle-of-the-road Economist also places the United States well down the pack. In the Economist Intelligence Unit's Index of Democracy 2011, the U.S. was ranked as the nineteenth most democratic country in the world, behind a group of mostly parliamentary countries, and not very far ahead of the "flawed democracies" (Economist Intelligence Unit 2011).

These findings will come as no surprise to anyone who has examined the empirical literature on liberty and constitutional design. Parliamentary governments, which lack a separation of powers, rank significantly higher on measures of political freedom.<sup>1</sup> That's not to deny that America is one of the freest countries in the world. It's simply to assert that it wasn't the presidential system that made the difference. What makes America exceptional is that it has for more than 200 years remained free while yet presidential.

### I. DEFINING LIBERTY

During the Revolution, the Loyalists protested that there was no need to fight for freedom. America was already free, likely the freest country in the world. Britain might appoint the Royal governors, they said, but the important point was that, for the most part, it didn't bother the colonists with silly laws.

Where the Loyalists and Patriots disagreed was over what counts as liberty. Benjamin Constant later explained the difference in an 1819 essay that

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<sup>1</sup> See Adserà and Boix 2008, Norris 2008, Lijphart 2004 and Shugart and Haggard 2001. Such studies were inspired by Linz's path-breaking study of the failure of presidential governments. Linz 1994.

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contrasted the “Liberty of the Ancients” with the “Liberty of the Moderns” (Constant 1988). In the ancient world, liberty meant the right to participate in government in the public assembly, a right that the citizens of small Greek city-states might exercise though not the subjects of a larger state. Transposed to America, the liberty of the ancients was a call to duty as well as a right, a duty of civic virtue and personal responsibility, in which citizens of an extended republic were summoned to deliberate about the public interest. That was where America was wanting, during the colonial period, said the Patriots.

By contrast, the Liberty of the Moderns was the right to do what one wanted, without injuring others, free from government interference or duties of public participation, and that’s what the Loyalists said America had. Constant’s ancients had had self-government, but then could pass laws that imposed the broadest restrictions on the most private of personal decisions—one’s religion and way of life. As Constant’s moderns, the Loyalists recognized that they weren’t going to be able to participate effectively in government. All they wanted the state to do was to leave them alone.

Personal liberty, the liberty of the moderns, is a highly subjective concept, and intuitions about it are apt to be messy. To avoid this, two things might be done. First, countries may be ranked more easily according to their political than their personal liberty, the liberty of the ancients rather than the liberty of the moderns. Second, one can turn to organizations or scholars that rank countries according to their political liberty. The most widely-used such rankings are provided by Freedom House’s index of liberal democracy, the Polity IV measure of constitutional democracy, Tatu Vanhala’s assessment of participatory democracy and the measure of contested democracy provided by Adam Przeworski and his colleagues.

In what follows I restrict my analysis to how political rights as measured by Freedom House might be affected by the choice between presidential and parliamentary government. I do so for three reasons. First, Freedom House has the deepest bench of experts across the world assessing political freedom. Each year it ranks 195 countries according to their political rights, relying on a process of analysis and evaluation by a team of regional experts and scholars. The rankings are based on a series of questions: are there free and fair elections, are there competitive political parties, are minority groups reasonably represented in the political process? Second, while Polity IV data goes all the way back to 1800, I wanted to concentrate on the more recent period covered by Freedom House, from 1972 to 2010. Third, all four measures of political freedom are strongly correlated with each other and similar findings are reported when each is employed as a dependent variable (Norris 2008, pp. 56, 61-71, 152-53).

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## 2. THE PITFALLS OF PRESIDENTIALISM

There are three reasons why presidential government might be thought to threaten political freedom, Constant's liberty of the ancients.

- As heads of state, presidents enjoy a prestige and status denied prime ministers in a parliamentary system, and might exploit this to assume greater powers.
- Prime ministers are more accountable for their misbehavior than presidents, who hold office for a fixed period of time and are freed from daily scrutiny before a House of Commons.
- There is a greater possibility of deadlock in a presidential system, with its checks and balances. These invite a president to step in and assume greater powers.

### 2.1 Jack Spratt's Law

In *The American Presidency*, Clinton Rossiter offered a mythic account of American government, in which the presidents portrayed on Mount Rushmore serve the need for mystery and theatrics in national life. Who, he asked, "are the most satisfying of our folk heroes? With whom is associated a wonderful web of slogans and shrines and heroics? The answer, plainly, is the ... Presidents I have pointed to most proudly. Each is an authentic folk hero, each a symbol of some virtue or dream especially dear to Americans" (Rossiter 1963, p. 100). Like Rossiter, most Americans identify with their presidents. They see themselves raised up by a successful president and shamed by a lying one. They share in the glory and the ignominy.

That's not the kind of president—an elective monarch—the Framers wanted. What they had in mind was more the sober head of government one finds in a parliamentary system. A prime minister wields at least as much power in his country as a president would in his. In one respect, however, a prime minister lacks the authority that a president enjoys, for presidents and not prime ministers are heads of state.

As a matter of form, the Queen and not the prime minister summons, prorogues and dissolves parliament, greets foreign heads of state, presents honors and awards, signs commissions, receives ambassadors, signs bills into law and takes precedence before any of her subjects. In all of this, the Queen represents

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what Walter Bagehot called the dignified, as opposed to the efficient, element of the British constitution. The efficient part is that which give us laws and rules, while the dignified part may be seen in the ceremonies associated with the enactment of laws. Bagehot had recognized that the eighteenth century British constitution, with its separation of powers amongst the House of Commons, House of Lords and King, was no more; and that, of the efficient part of the constitution, only the House of Commons remained. When it came to the dignified or ceremonial part of the constitution, however, the vestiges of the separation of powers could still be observed, in the person of the sovereign and the hereditary House of Lords, whose consent as a matter of form was required before a bill became law.

What Bagehot described was Jack Spratt's Law applied to the constitution, in which real power and ceremony, lean and fat, are cleaved off from each other. That was how, he thought, a republic had "insinuated itself beneath the folds of a Monarchy" (Bagehot 2001, p. 48). By contrast, where a president, as head of state, can clothe himself in the symbols of nationhood, he might amass an excessive degree of political power and a monarchy might insinuate itself beneath the folds of a republic. That might help explain why one sees presidents-for-life, but not prime-ministers-for-life.

### 2.2 Accountability

North Dakota residents might believe the United States relatively free from corruption. People from Louisiana might think differently. However, both might be surprised to find how low the United States ranks in the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, where it comes in at number 24.<sup>2</sup> Another surprise comes from how poorly presidential regimes fare in the rankings. Leaving Hong Kong and Qatar out of the mix, every country ahead of the United States on the list save for Chile has a parliamentary government.

The greater level of governmental corruption in presidential regimes might plausibly be attributed to differences in accountability. Prime ministers are more accountable for misbehavior than presidents, who hold office for a fixed period of time, during which it is extremely difficult to remove them. A prime minister may

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<sup>2</sup> Similarly, the United States ranks 29th out of 214 countries in the World Bank's 2011 Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) measure of public corruption. World Bank 2011. Next to the TI rankings of corruption, the WGI rankings, which aggregate 30 different data sources, are the most commonly accepted measure of public corruption.

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be removed at any time when parliament is in session through a non-confidence motion. Presidents are also freed from daily accountability for their administration before an Opposition in a House of Commons. Congress is given an oversight role in cabinet appointments and the hearings it holds, but this cannot compare to the Opposition's ability, for as long as it wants, to hold a government's feet to the fire. For both reasons, presidents are better positioned than prime ministers to hide their misdeeds and to assume dictatorial powers.

### 2.3 Deadlock

The checks and balances of the separation of powers in a presidential regime require both the executive and Congress to agree on legislation, and results in a deadlock when they fail to do so. George Tsebelis modeled the problem as one of veto players, defined as players whose assent is required before any change is made to the status quo. As the number of veto players increases, so does the probability of deadlock (Tsebelis 2002, p.19). In a parliamentary system with a majority government only one party has a veto power: the prime minister and his party. In a presidential system with a bicameral legislature, however, at least three parties have veto powers: the president and the majority party in each of the upper and lower house. The increased likelihood of deadlock in a presidential system might invite dictators to step in and cure the problem by ruling extra-legally, or at a minimum to expand the scope of executive power.

### 3. AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

What follows is an empirical study of the determinants of political freedom, using panel (cross-section time-series) data provided by Arthur S. Banks for 135 countries over 1972-2010.<sup>3</sup> The dependent variable is Freedom House's rankings of political rights, which reports that such rights at first expanded and then contracted over the period. The number of unfree countries fell from 69 in 1973 to 38 immediately after the fall of communism, and subsequently rose to 47 in 2010. In recent years, the democratic wave that began after the fall of communism has receded and the world has slipped into what Larry Diamond has called a "democratic recession" (Diamond 2008). Summarizing recent trends, the

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<sup>3</sup> Banks 2011. Unlike Banks, I categorize Macedonia, Poland and Switzerland as parliamentary regimes. If a country was once presidential (e.g. Nigeria) or parliamentary (e.g. Turkey) and thereafter became undemocratic, I list it as presidential or parliamentary, since that is precisely the relationship of interest.

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Economist Intelligence Unit reports:

A political malaise in east-central Europe has led to disappointment and questioning of the strength of the region's democratic transition. Media freedoms have been eroded across Latin America and populist forces with dubious democratic credentials have come to the fore in a few countries in the region. In the developed West, a precipitous decline in political participation, weaknesses in the functioning of government and security-related curbs on civil liberties are having a corrosive effect on some long-established democracies (Economist Intelligence Unit 2011, p. 3).

It is evidently timely to ask whether parliamentary regimes have weathered these changes better than presidential ones, and to do this my study updates prior studies, notably that of Pippa Norris which was truncated at 2004. The basic unit of analysis is the country-year, with one observation for each country for each year.

I estimate Freedom House rankings through an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) linear regression with panel-corrected standard errors (PCSE). OLS regression assumes that errors (variations around the regression line) are uniform across different levels of democracy. This assumption is likely to be violated with panel data, where the variances of the errors can be expected to differ for each country, and this would inflate the significance level of the coefficients. Following an influential article by Nathaniel Beck and Jonathan Katz (Beck and Katz 1995), it is now conventional to correct for this with PCSE estimation procedures, which are most appropriate where, as here, the number of countries (136) is far greater than the number of years (39). Nevertheless, the PCSE assumption that the errors are free of serial correlation is unwarranted in time-series cross-sectional data. Political transitions are rare and the regime in time  $t$  can be expected to be correlated with the regime in  $t-1$ . I therefore employ a Prais-Winsten regression to correct the standard errors for autocorrelation, which generally has the effect of reducing both the  $R^2$  and size of the coefficients.

### 3.1 Presidentialism

The explanatory (independent) variable of greatest interest is Presidential, which takes the value of 1 for presidential regimes and 0 for parliamentary ones. I list presidential and parliamentary regimes by country in Table 1. Not every

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country with a president counts as presidential, but only those whose president is the head of government as well as head of state. This excludes countries such as Germany that have a merely ceremonial president. Where a country has a president as head of state but a prime minister as head of government, I classify it as parliamentary. I exclude countries that disappeared (e.g., South Vietnam) as well as non-democratic monarchies (e.g., Saudi Arabia) and out-and-out dictatorships (e.g., North Korea).

Amongst presidential countries, there are a variety of constitutional forms, and Maurice Duverger proposed that semi-presidential regimes be distinguished from pure presidential ones (Duverger 1980). In France, for example, the legislative Chamber can dismiss the presidential cabinet appointed, and thus has greater power than an American Congress. However, the distinction between the various kinds of presidential regimes is hazy (Siaroff 2003, Roper 2002), and I categorize all of them as presidential.

In her empirical study of presidentialism, Norris distinguished between the two kinds of regimes on a formal basis, according to how they define themselves in their constitutions. As such she classified Putin's Russia as a "mixed" regime, neither presidential nor parliamentary. By contrast, I categorize regimes according to where power really resides, and list Russia as a presidential country. Putin is the effective ruler of Russia, and I see his interlude as prime minister as a transparent device to sidestep term limits. While Norris classified 43 countries as presidential and 31 as parliamentary in 2003, then, my study lists 82 as presidential and 47 as parliamentary (with some countries switching from one regime to the other between 1972 and 2010).

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The distinction between the two systems of government is blurred at the edges. Juan Linz was the first scholar to argue that presidentialism leads to dictatorship (Linz 1994), and he sparked a lengthy literature on the two forms of government (Lijphart 2004, Shugart and Haggard 2001, Stepan and Skach, 1993). Linz placed the blame on the potential for conflict between the branches of government under the separation of powers in presidential regimes. This, he said, would lead to gridlock and instability, and would invite a dictator to step in. But parliamentary regimes are often unstable themselves. While some parliamentary countries are effectively unicameral (e.g., Britain and Canada), with upper houses that lack real power, others are bicameral, with an elective and politically effective Senate. This can result in a deadlock between the two houses of the legislature, as happened in Australia in 1975. Again, while some parliamentary

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governments (e.g., Britain and Canada) feature first-past-the-post plurality single-member districts, others elect representatives by proportional representation and have several members for each district (e.g., Denmark, Germany), and some (e.g. New Zealand) have a combination of both systems. Italy has a parliamentary form of government, but its system of proportional representation has notoriously led to political instability, with 61 different governments since 1945. The shortest of its governments lasted only nine days. Even in first-past-the-post systems, some countries (e.g., Canada) have for historical reasons had significant third parties and nearly half the Canadian general elections since 1957 have returned minority governments. The minority Clark government lasted only two months from the time it first met parliament in 1979.

If gridlock is not unknown in parliamentary systems, it is often absent in presidential systems. While deadlock might seem a permanent feature of the separation of powers, it is less likely to happen when one party scores a hat trick and takes the presidency and both branches of Congress. This has occurred more often than one might think, 40 percent of the time since the Second World War in the United States. Moreover, even when different parties hold different branches, political parties often compromise on legislation. In the past, as many bills were passed in periods of American divided government as they were when one party controlled all three branches of government (Mayhew 2005, p. 76). Similarly, when the presidency and the legislature in other countries are controlled by different parties, both sides not infrequently work it out with a coalition government (“cohabitation” in France).

Deadlock can arise in both systems, then, and both systems have ways of dealing with it. In an empirical study, José Cheibub reported that presidential systems were no more vulnerable to breakdown than parliamentary ones (Cheibub 2007, pp. 154-55).<sup>4</sup> That said, presidential democracies do have shorter life spans than parliamentary ones. In Cheibub’s sample over the 1946-2002 period, the expected life of a parliamentary democracy was 58 years, while that of a presidential democracy was only 24 years. Presidential systems are also significantly correlated with higher (unfree) Freedom House rankings, and if it’s not gridlock that makes the difference something else seems to do so.

### 3.2 Economic Variables

Apart from the form of government, one might expect Freedom House rankings to be correlated with the state of the economy, with lower (freer)

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<sup>4</sup> But see Norris 2008, pp. 154-55.

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Freedom House rankings in wealthier countries that have a higher per capita Gross Domestic Product. Adam Przeworski reports that no country that became a democracy ever fell back into dictatorship if it had a per capita income higher than that of Argentina in 1975 (\$6,055 in 1985 dollars) (Przeworski 2006). Increased wealth tends to grow a middle class that demands democracy and freedom, the example being Chile's evolution from military rule in the 1980s. What Przeworski and his colleagues did not find, however, was that increased wealth by itself leads to democratization, the example here being the Chinese model of relative economic liberty and political repression. Wealth makes democracies stable, but it's less than clear that it makes dictatorships unstable.<sup>5</sup> However, Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson have found that the relationship between per capita GDP and Freedom House rankings during the 1990s was very close (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, p. 52, Figure 3.5), and one would expect the strong correlation to hold for the 1972-2010 period of this study, for my LogGDP variable.

Greater income inequality would be expected to lead to calls for redistributionist measures of the kind associated with populist strongmen and dictators (e.g., Argentina's Peróns and Venezuela's Chávez). Income inequality is measured by the Gini coefficient, expressed as a ratio from zero to one, where zero means perfect equality and one means perfect inequality. Clear data on income inequality are hard to come by and there are significant measurement issues,<sup>6</sup> but the Gini coefficient nevertheless permits one to identify states most

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<sup>5</sup> See Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi. 2000, p. 98. Similarly, historical factors specific to each country have been found crucially to explain the relation between democracy and economic development, and on a fixed effects model there is no evidence that one causes the other. Acemoglu, Johnson, Robinson and Yared. 2008. See also Barro and Sala-i-Martin. 2006, p. 529. However, Przeworski et al.'s findings have been challenged on a three-way rather than a dichotomous characterization of regimes. Epstein, Bates, Goldstone, Kristensen and O'Halloran. 2006.

<sup>6</sup> The Gini data was compiled from the CIA World Fact Book, since other cross-country data sets are problematical. The World Bank data uses both income and consumption metrics as well as individual and household methodologies, without clarifying what metric and methodology was being used to arrive at any given data point. The UN data notes which metric and methodology is employed, but no metric or methodology sufficiently dominates to allow for a broad cross-country analysis. By contrast, the CIA data is consistently based on family income. While there are often only one or two data points per country, there is not a great deal of

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susceptible to populist revolutions. With a higher Gini ratio, then, one would expect a higher (unfree) Freedom House ranking, and once again Acemoglu and Robinson so found when they examined the relationship between the two variables. As they note, however, the empirical literature on the relationship between inequality and democracy is mixed (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, pp. 58-61, Figure 3.15).

### 3.3 Political Variables

Newly independent countries, whose memories of political freedom are recent, can be expected to be more likely to relapse into dictatorship. Torsten Persson and Guido Tabellini report that countries with greater experience with democracy have “democratic capital,” and that this makes them less likely to fall into dictatorship and more likely to emerge from it (Persson and Tabellini 2009). One would therefore expect that long established countries, of greater Age, would have lower (freer) Freedom House rankings.

Severe political unrest would be expected to be correlated with a higher (unfree) Freedom House ranking. Labor unrest, demonstrations and weaker political disturbances are common in politically free countries, and the Revolution explanatory variable equals 1 only if there was an illegal or forced change in the top government elite, any attempt at such a change, or any successful or unsuccessful armed rebellion whose aim is independence from the central government.

### 3.4 Cultural Variables

Cultural differences importantly explain differences in economic growth. Ghana and South Korea had very similar economies and per capita GDP in the 1960s. Thirty years later, the South Korean per capita GDP was fifteen times that of Ghana. What explained the difference, said Samuel Huntington, was each country’s culture (Huntington 2000, p. xiii). One might similarly expect cultural differences to explain differences in political freedom. In part this might result from the positive contribution of culture to wealth that in turn promotes political freedom. However, cultural differences might separately explain the willingness

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variation over the period, and it was necessary to extrapolate. Having no particular theory for the variation of inequality through time, a simple method was employed: averaging all the data for each country and extrapolating it through the entire period.

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to tolerate political oppression and departures from constitutional rules and conventions, and might account for differences in political freedom between, say, Venezuela and the United States. Seymour Martin Lipset and Jason Lakin argued that Latin American countries were more ready to fall into dictatorship because they had been colonies of countries which were not themselves democratic (Lipset and Lakin 2004, chapter 11, Lipset 1990). A preference for strongmen as leaders was part of the colonial inheritance.

To test for the contribution of cultural factors, I employed four variables: British heritage, Latin American, African and literacy. British heritage might be correlated with greater political freedom, since the British colonial system is thought to have fostered self-government to a greater degree than other colonial empires.<sup>7</sup> Less plausibly, “legal origins” explanations of economic development claim that the British common law system made the difference, when compared with the civil law systems of the Continent (La Porta, Lopez-de-Silanes and Shleifer 2008). The claim is highly suspect, however, since differences between the two kinds of legal systems are largely theoretical. Latin American countries have notoriously cycled between dictatorship and democracy, and can be expected to have higher (unfree) Freedom House rankings. The same is true of African countries, many of which have enjoyed only a brief experience with political freedom after achieving independence. Finally, higher Literacy rates have been found to be correlated with a lower (more political freedom) Freedom House ranking (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006, p. 54, Figure 3.7).

### 3.5 Results

As expected, the Presidential variable is significantly and strongly correlated with Freedom House rankings, with presidential regimes less free than parliamentary ones.<sup>8</sup> The difference between presidential and parliamentary

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<sup>7</sup> Amongst poor countries, ex-British colonies have been found more likely to be stable democracies. Clague, Gleason and Knack 2001.

<sup>8</sup> I replicated these findings in an ordered logistic regression procedure, clustered by country, to absorb the effects particular to each country. I also replicated these findings in a regression on Polity IV, which ranks countries on a scale of -10 to +10, with higher scores indicating greater political freedom (unlike Freedom House, which gives higher scores to countries with less freedom). The Polity IV and Freedom House rankings are closely correlated (Pearson’s  $r = -0.90$ ), and again presidential regimes were significantly correlated with less political

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systems was associated with a one- or two-point gain on the Freedom House scale. In 2012 a one-point differential was the difference between the United States and Cristina Kirchner's Argentina; a two-point differential was the difference between the United States and Evo Morales' Bolivia.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

These findings are consistent with those of Norris, who defined the presidential-parliamentary distinction differently, and who employed a data set from an earlier period, without correcting for autocorrelation. The findings are also consistent with Przeworski et al., who found that parliamentary democracies are more durable than presidential ones. The probability that a presidential democracy will self-destruct is 0.0477 a year, compared to 0.0138 for a parliamentary democracy. This means that the expected life of a presidential democracy is 21 years, compared to 73 years for a parliamentary democracy (Przeworski et al. 2000, pp. 129-36).

The wealth (LogGDP) variable is significant and negative (more political freedom) for all regressions. The result is of interest, since it is in apparent conflict with the more ambiguous findings of Przeworski et al. about the modernization thesis that more wealth means more political freedom. Those findings might lead one to expect the absence of a correlation between LogGDP and Freedom House rankings, but the LogGDP coefficient in Table 2 was significantly correlated with greater political freedom on the Freedom House scale.

Of the political variables, there was a strong and significant correlation between the Freedom House ranking and the Age of a country. The longer a country has been independent, the more likely it is to be free. The older countries of Western Europe and the United States all have high Freedom House rankings. That said, South American countries also have high Age rankings and low scores on the Freedom House scale. As expected, the Revolution variable was positive, if weak: more revolutions, a little less freedom.

The cultural variables had weak explanatory power. The variable was significant and had the expected negative sign. While the coefficient was small, this was not unexpected, since the comparison is not between different colonial empires but rather between former British colonies and the rest of the world, including the parliamentary countries of Europe. When ex-British colonies were

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freedom. I report on all these findings in my public dropbox folder, where I also include all my data.

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compared to the former colonies of other European countries, Robert Barro found that a British heritage was associated with higher levels of democracy (Barro 1997, pp. 73-75). The Literacy coefficient also had the expected negative sign, but a very small magnitude.

In sum, presidential political systems have not proven hospitable to liberty. Amongst presidential countries, the United States stands out as exceptional in its political freedom. For every year in which Freedom House ranked countries, the United States (along with Britain, Canada, and most other first world countries) received a score of 1 (most freedom), while many presidential regimes received much higher (worse) scores. Some Americans, particularly conservatives, attribute their country's relative liberty to its constitution, but this betrays an ignorance of the experience of liberty in other constitutional regimes.

In an effort to explain just why America is exceptional, I estimated the coefficients from Table 6.2 again, this time dropping parliamentary regimes and employing a dummy variable for the United States (US Presidential), with the results shown in Table 3. This procedure compares the United State with other presidential regimes.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

The US Presidential dummy variable has a negative sign in the first three regressions, indicating greater political freedom in America than in other presidential regimes. In the fourth regression, the coefficient is small and is not significant, while it is significant and positive in the fifth regression. Other explanatory variables have the expected sign, and the LogGDP and Age and coefficients are relatively large and significant. It also helps to be British or have been a former British colony. American exceptionalism can thus be attributed to the fact that it is a wealthy, older country with a British heritage. This has made America a free country, in spite of its constitution.

#### 4. PRESIDENTS AND MILITARISM

Cheibub recognized that presidential democracies are more likely to turn into dictatorships than parliamentary ones, but sought to account for this by positing a relationship between presidentialism and militarism. Scholars such as Linz who think presidential governments more unstable have the causal relationship backwards, he argued. It's not that presidential regimes lead to undemocratic, militaristic governments; it's that, when they become democratic,

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militaristic governments become presidential and subsequently more easily flip back into a militaristic dictatorship.

Cheibub did not explain why this nexus arose, however. He discounted the suggestion that, on emerging from a military dictatorship, a country opts for presidentialism because the departing military dictators insist on presidential government as a condition for giving up power. The departing colonels seldom have much of a choice in the matter (although this might not be true of the countries that emerged from the former Soviet Union, Easter 1997). What Cheibub was left with, then, by way of explanation, is an historical accident, particular to Latin America. Such a nexus does exist, however, and in what follows I offer an explanation that is consistent with the view that presidentialism is dangerous for political freedom.

If the departing colonels don't pick presidents to succeed them, the most plausible explanation for the nexus is that presidents like colonels, and that presidential regimes have bigger militaries. Presidents can embark on a war without the need for Congressional approval, and continue it once begun. Congress might vote to deny supplies to the troops in the field, but the political cost of doing so is too great to make this a serious option. In theory, a prime minister possesses the same unfettered ability to take his country into war. Nevertheless, the advantage lies with presidents, for prime ministers lack a president's ability to act unilaterally. The absence of the separation of powers in parliamentary regimes, and the government's day-to-day accountability to the House of Commons, makes it far more difficult for a prime minister to disregard parliament's wishes. A presidential government that can readily go to war is likely a government more likely to go to war, and a government with a greater military budget.

More than 2,000 years ago Polybius noted the relationship between militarism and constitutional design, in comparing the constitutions of Sparta and the Roman republic. Sparta had something like a parliamentary government, in which the kings shared power with the ephors, senate and assembly. Rome also had a mixed form of government, but when it came to war the consuls' powers were almost uncontrolled. In Sparta, the "legislation of Lycurgus" served its purpose in defensive wars, when all the branches of government were united against an external enemy, but proved less satisfactory in an offensive and less popular campaign.

For the purpose of remaining in secure possession of their own territory and maintaining their freedom the legislation of Lycurgus is amply sufficient ... but if anyone is ambitious of greater things,

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and esteems it finer and more glorious than that to be the leader of many men and to rule and lord it over many and have the eyes of all the world turned to him, it must be admitted that from this point of view the Laconian constitution is defective, while that of Rome is superior and better framed for the attainment of power, as is indeed evident from the actual course of events. For when the Lacedaemonians endeavoured to obtain supremacy in Greece, they very soon ran the risk of losing their own liberty; whereas the Romans, who had aimed merely at the subjection of Italy, in a short time brought the whole world under their sway (Polybius 2011 383, vi.50).

The lesson from Polybius is that, if one really wants a militaristic government and imperialism, presidential regimes are the way to go.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

To test this, I estimated a country's military budget as a percent of GDP in the regression equation seen in Table 4. I posited that the size of the budget would depend principally on three things: the form of government (presidential vs. parliamentary), whether the country was threatened by foreign enemies (Enemy) and whether it faced the threat of an internal revolution (Revolution). The Enemy variable is dichotomous (with dummy variables) and takes the value of 1 if I thought it faced an external enemy, but not if it simply threatened another country itself.<sup>9</sup> To this I added two dummy variables: first, following Cheibub, for Latin America; and second, for the United States.

The U.S. provides 41 percent of the world's total spending on military expenditures, and the next country on my list (Russia) spends only one-tenth of that. For an American president, this is a wonderful toy, which he can safely use in conducting a series of splendid little wars, if not a costly and protracted land war in Asia. Unsurprisingly, there is evidence to support the "diversionary hypothesis" that the decision to use military force is made strategically in order to distract the attention of voters from domestic messes (Ostrom and Job 1986,

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<sup>9</sup> As such I considered that NATO countries faced an enemy from the date they joined the alliance until the fall of communism, and from 2002-10 (since Article V of the Nato Treaty had been invoked after 9-11). Other countries that I considered to have enemies were Taiwan, Egypt, Georgia, India, South Korea, Pakistan, Poland and the Ukraine. I did not list Russia as possessing an enemy.

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James and Oneal 1991, Hess and Orphanides 1995). For example, presidents are more likely to go to war during periods of high unemployment (Howell and Pevehouse 2007, pp. 65-66 at Tables 3.2 and 3.3; Park 2010).

As expected, I found that the presidential variable was associated with a small but significantly increased military budget. With the different estimation procedures I employed, a switch from a parliamentary to a presidential regime would be associated with a 10 to 50 percent increase in a country's military budget. While the equations explain only a small amount of the variance, the Presidential coefficient was positive and significant at the .001 level. Presidents like bigger militaries. The Latin American and US variables were also positive and significant at the .001 level. Latin American countries are indeed more militaristic, as Cheibub has argued.

Conservative scholars such as John Yoo have persuasively argued that presidents are better at waging war when their hands are not tied by Congress, and in this respect presidential governments might enjoy an advantage over parliamentary ones (Yoo 2006). The presidential power to embark on a war without the need for Congressional approval, or to continue a war once begun, makes America a more dangerous foe. Yoo might thus be correct in arguing that presidential countries are better at fighting wars than parliamentary ones. The reverse of the coin, however, is that America may have gotten a bigger military and more wars in the bargain.

### 5. CONCLUSION

America is clearly exceptional in the size of its military budget, which equals almost as much as the military spending of the rest of the world put together. In other respects it is less than exceptional. It's not the only free country around, and not even in the top tier on rankings of economic freedom. It is reported to have less political freedom—Constant's liberty of the ancients—than countries such as Australia and Canada that retained a parliamentary system of government and achieved their independence through peaceful means. What is exceptional about America is its relative freedom, amongst presidential countries.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

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Table 1. Presidential vs. Parliamentary Governments

	Countries
Presidential	Albania, Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh (1974-90), Belarus, Bénin, Bolivia, Botswana, Brazil, Burma (prior to 1974), Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Chile, Columbia, Congo (Brazzaville), Congo-DR, Costa Rica, Croatia, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Ghana, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana (1980-present), Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Ivory Coast, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia (before 1993), Liberia, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malawi, Maldives, Mali, Mexico, Moldova (before 2000), Mozambique, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria (after 1978), Pakistan (1972, 1978-87, 2002-10), Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Rwanda, Sénégal, Somalia, South Africa, South Korea, Sri Lanka (after 1977), Sudan, Suriname, Taiwan (after 1977), Tajikistan, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, United States, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Zaire, Zambia, Zimbabwe (after 1986)
Parliamentary	Antigua, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh (1972-73, 1991-2010), Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bulgaria, Burma (after 1973), Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, Finland, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guyana (pre-1980), Hungary, Iceland, India, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Latvia (after 1992), Luxembourg, Macedonia, Moldova (after 1999), Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria (before 1979), Norway, Pakistan (1973-77, 1988-2001), Poland, Portugal, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka (before 1978), Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan (before 1978), Thailand, Trinidad, Turkey, United Kingdom, Zimbabwe (before 1987)
	<i>Source:</i> Arthur S. Banks, User's Manual, Cross-National Time-Series Data Archive 2011; author (Macedonia, Poland, Switzerland)

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Table 2 Political Systems and Freedom House's Measure of Political Freedom, 1972-2010

	Economic	Political	Cultural	All
Presidential	.89*** (.15)	1.52*** (.15)	.94*** (.16)	.74*** (.16)
LogGDP	-1.18*** (.12)			-.49*** (.13)
Gini	.008 (.009)			.02 (.01)
Age		-2.31*** (.25)		-1.51*** (.20)
Revolution		.09*** (.02)		.11*** (.03)
British			-.34* (.17)	-.61*** (.24)
Latin			-.27 (.28)	.10 (.34)
African			.89*** (.28)	.37 (.33)
Literacy			-.003*** (.0004)	-.002*** (.0004)
Constant	6.33*** (.61)	3.55*** (.15)	4.83*** (.16)	6.02*** (.61)
No. of observations	3492	4277	3805	3092
No. of countries	108	133	135	105
R <sup>2</sup>	.23	.23	.25	.28

*Notes.* The dependent variable is the Freedom House ranking of political freedom, where higher scores indicate less freedom. Entries are OLS linear Prais-Winsten regression coefficients on pooled, time-series cross-national data, with panel-corrected standard errors, using the Stata `xtpcse y x1 x2 x3, pairwise corr (ar1)` command, after encoding the data by country with the `encode Country, gen (country1)` and `xtset country1 Year` commands. For a list of countries by type of government, see Table 1. For the definition of the variables see Table 6.2. \*\*\* significant at the .001 level, \*\* at the .01 level, \* at the .05 level. Standard errors in parentheses.

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Table 3 Political Systems and Freedom House's Measure of Political Freedom, 1972-2010: U.S. vs. other Presidential Regimes

	Economic	Political	Cultural	All
US Presidential	-2.01*** (.24)	-2.01*** (.26)	-2.77*** (.27)	-.13 (.46)
LogGDP	-.99*** (.15)			-.38* (.19)
Gini	-.03** (.01)			-.005 (.01)
Age		-2.66*** (.41)		-2.30*** (.46)
Revolution		.07** (.02)		.09** (.03)
British			-.39 (.28)	-.72* (.36)
Latin			-1.29*** (.30)	.38 (.40)
African			.17 (.27)	.16 (.32)
Literacy			-.002*** (.0004)	-.002*** (.0005)
Constant	8.58*** (.67)	5.67*** (.22)	6.12*** (.37)	7.84*** (.65)
No. of Observations	2285	2801	2552	2022
No. of countries	74	91	92	73
R <sup>2</sup>	.21	.24	.25	.27

*Notes.* The dependent variable is the Freedom House ranking of political freedom. Entries are OLS linear Prais-Winsten regression coefficients on pooled, time-series cross-national data, with panel-corrected standard errors, using the Stata `xtpcse y x1 x2 x3, pairwise corr (ar1)` command, after encoding the data by country with the `encode Country, gen (country1)` and `xtset country1 Year` commands. For a list of countries by type of government, see Table 6.1. For the definition of the variables see Table 6.2. \*\*\* significant at the .001 level, \*\* at the .01 level, \* at the .05 level. Standard errors in parentheses.

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Table 4 Political Systems and Military Expenditures per GDP

Presidential	.87*** (.04)	.61*** (.04)	.52*** (.05)
Enemy	.59*** (.06)	.72*** (.06)	.58*** (.05)
Revolution	.22 (.13)	.24 (.13)	.26* (.13)
Latin		1.08*** (.04)	1.12*** (.04)
US			2.59*** (.06)
Constant	1.72*** (.04)	1.67*** (.04)	1.72*** (.03)
No. of Observations	3966	3966	3966
No. of countries	123	123	123
R <sup>2</sup>	.01	.03	.03

*Notes.* The dependent variable is the average of military expenditure/GDP in 1988 and 2010. Entries are xtpcse regressions, using the Stata xtpcse y x<sub>1</sub> x<sub>2</sub> x<sub>3</sub>, pairwise command. For the list of countries by type of government, see Table 6.2. For the definition of the variables see Table 6.2. Significant at \*\*\* the .001 level, \*\* the .01 level, \* the .05 level. Standard errors in parenthesis.

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Table 5      Variables and Sources

Dependent Variables		
	Freedom House	Freedom House ranking of freedom, with 1 = most free and 7 = least free  <i>Source:</i> <a href="http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world">http://www.freedomhouse.org/report-types/freedom-world</a>
	PolityIV	Polity IV Annual Time-Series  <i>Source:</i> <a href="http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm">http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscr/inscr.htm</a> , excel time series data, polity2, column (K).
	Military	Average of Military Expenditure/GDP in 1988 and 2010. Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Initiative (SIPRI),  <i>Source:</i> <a href="http://www.sipri.org/">http://www.sipri.org/</a>
Explanatory Variables		
	Presidential	Equals 1 if a presidential regime; 0 if a parliamentary regime  <i>Source:</i> Banks Cross-National Time Series Data Archive (“Banks”), at <a href="http://www.databanksinternational.com/71.html">http://www.databanksinternational.com/71.html</a>
	US Presidential	Equals 1 if the United States, 0 if a presidential regime other than the United States
	LogGDP	Log of GDP per capita.  <i>Sources:</i> World Bank, United Nations, at <a href="http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/dnllist.asp">http://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/dnllist.asp</a>
	Gini	Gini measure of statistical dispersion of income, where 0 represents perfect equality a 1 perfect inequality.  <i>Sources:</i> CIA Fact Book.
	Age	Number of years the country has been independent/210 (on the assumption that the oldest country achieved independence in 1800)  <i>Source:</i> Democracy Cross-national Codebook compiled by Pippa Norris, at <a href="http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Data/Democracy%20Cr">http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Data/Democracy%20Cr</a>

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		ossNational%20Data/Democracy%20Crossnational%20Codebook%20March%202009.pdf
	Revolution	Equals 1 if there was any illegal or forced change in the top government elite, any attempt at such a change, or any successful or unsuccessful armed rebellion whose aim is independence from the central government; 0 otherwise.  <i>Source: Banks Domestic7</i>
	British	Equals 1 if the country is Britain or was once a British colony; 0 otherwise
	Latin	Equals 1 if the country is a Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking country in South or Central America; 0 otherwise
	African	Equals 1 if the country is in Africa; 0 otherwise
	Literacy	Percent literate, 15 years of age and over.  <i>Source: Banks school12 (.001)</i>
	Enemy	Equals 1 if the country is threatened by an external enemy; 0 otherwise  <i>Source: Author</i>
	US	Equals 1 if the United States, 0 otherwise

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Table 6 Estimated Coefficients for a Country's Freedom House Ranking in an Ordered Logistic Regression, clustered by country, for dropbox only

	Economic	Political	Cultural	All
Presidential	1.71*** (.50)	3.42*** (.33)	3.10*** (.51)	1.64*** (.43)
LogGDP	-2.53*** (.26)			-1.66* (.54)
Gini	-.01 (.02)			.02 (.03)
Age		-3.10*** (.41)		-2.37*** (.71)
Revolution		.53** (.18)		.32* (.13)
British			-.17 (.32)	-.69 (.36)
Latin			-1.22** (.43)	.47 (.57)
African			-.48 (.49)	-.02 (.56)
Literacy			-.004 (.0006)	-.002 (.001)
No. of Observations	3492	4277	3805	3092
No. of Countries	108	133	135	105
Pseudo R-squared	.24	.21	.22	.28

*Notes.* The dependent variable is the Freedom House ranking of political freedom. Entries are regressions on pooled, time-series cross-national data, with an ordered logistic regression, clustered by country, using Stata's `ologit y x1 x2 x3, cluster (Country)` command. For a list of countries by type of government, see Table 6.1. For the definition of the variables see the Table 6.2. \*\*\* significant at the .001 level, \*\* at the .01 level, \* at the .05 level. Standard Errors in parenthesis.

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Table 7 Political Systems and Polity IV's Measure of Political Freedom, 1972-2010, for dropbox only

	Economic	Political	Cultural	All
Presidential	-3.93*** (.57)	-4.17*** .54	-3.53*** (.55)	-3.80*** (.62)
LogGDP	3.10*** (.45)			1.21* (.52)
Gini	-.002 (.04)			.006 (.04)
Age		6.65*** (1.40)		3.40*** (.99)
Revolution		-.11 (.07)		-.20* (.09)
British			.80 (.69)	1.17 (.92)
Latin			1.19 (1.29)	.08 (1.46)
African			-1.34 (1.24)	-.47 (1.34)
Literacy			.01*** (.002)	.008*** (.002)
Constant	-4.27 2.46	2.30* (1.02)	-2.78 (.55)	-6.348 (2.68)
No. of observations	3409	3927	3572	3016
No. of countries	105	122	124	102
R <sup>2</sup>	.06	.04	.08	.09

*Notes.* The dependent variable is the Polity IV ranking of political freedom, which ranges from -10 to +10. Unlike the Freedom House ranking, a higher measure in Polity IV indicates greater freedom. Entries are OLS linear Prais-Winsten regression coefficients on pooled, time-series cross-national data, with panel-corrected standard errors, using the Stata `xtpcse y x1 x2 x3, pairwise corr (ar1)` command, after encoding the data by country with the `encode Country, gen (country1)` and `xtset country1 Year` commands. For a list of countries by type of government, see Table 6.1. For the definition of the variables see the Table 6.2. \*\*\* significant at the .001 level, \*\* at the .01 level, \* at the .05 level. Standard errors in parentheses.