



# A Comparative Study of The Russian Super-Presidential System and the French Semi-Presidential System

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**Abstract:** In 1993, Russia faced a constitutional crisis which led to significant changes in its political system. During his tenure as the federal president, Yeltsin utilized the newly established constitution to consolidate power in the presidency, creating a unique political structure. Referred to as a "super-presidential system" in academic circles, this system is technically a dual-head system with the president and two parliamentary leaders, but in reality, the president holds the majority of power. Some experts argue that the "super-presidential system" is essentially a variation of the semi-presidential system, as the president wields considerable influence. In this paper, the French semi-presidential system and the Russian super presidential system are compared, and their reasons are analyzed.

**Keywords:** Russian super presidential system; French semi-presidential system, political similarities and differences

## 1 Introduction

In the French regime, the semi-presidential system places the president above the legislative, executive and judicial powers, making the president the most powerful. In 1993, Russia established a super-presidential system through a new constitution, and the president had absolute power in some areas. This system is somewhat similar to the French semi-presidential system, but each has its own characteristics. They operate successfully in their own unique way and have their own development trajectory.

Russia's super presidential system combines some characteristics of the French semi-presidential system and the American presidential system, aiming to strengthen the presidential power and reduce the restriction on the presidential power. Therefore, the Russian super-presidential system is in some ways similar to the French semi-presidential system, but in some ways even exceeds the French president.

### **1.1 The establishment of the French semi-presidential system and the establishment of the Russian super-presidential system**

A supplement to the concept and operation type of the semi-presidential system. The research on semi-presidential system by domestic scholars is based on foreign research, mainly supplementing the concept and operation types of semi-presidential system. Mainland scholars tend to call the semi-presidential system "semi-presidential and semi-parliamentary system", which is often involved in relevant political books, while Taiwan scholars tend to call it the "dual executive executive system". Taiwan scholar Su Zi-qiao has a deeper interpretation of the definition of the semi-presidential system. He in di well, on the basis of three famous characteristics, to the President has the power to question, think it is too fuzzy to define, and put forward between three republican constitutional system, the line lies in the presidential election and the power of the cabinet, in the presidential cabinet system, to the cabinet power in the presidential system.[1] Erge simplified the concept of a semi-presidential system to both a democratically elected president with a fixed term and a prime minister and cabinet responsible for the legislative power.[2]

### **1.2 The establishment of the French semi-presidential system**

The formation of the parliamentary system has its own path dependence and characteristics, including economy, political system of objective factors such as inertia, political cognition and thinking and other subjective path of locking system of government, also have external forces on the pressure of pressure factors interaction and influence, eventually caused the unique system of the modern country form: the democratic tradition of political culture of the formation of the parliamentary system is profound and lasting.[3]

The French semi-presidential system was established in 1958 and is an inevitable product of France's post-war economic and political development. At home, class conflicts and partisan struggles are fierce, and economic development needs a relatively stable and strong government to ensure.[4] De Gaulle attacked the Fourth Republic as "omnipotent party" and "the president's power is too small". De Gaulle said in Epinar that "executive power must never be generated from the legislative power, or even indirectly".[4] De Gaulle successfully implemented the semi-presidential system he envisioned and changed the presidential election system from indirect to direct election through the 1962 referendum. Immediately after taking the stage, de Gaulle introduced a new law called the 1958 Constitution, which increased the power of the president and the executive branch and created a new system of government —— the semi-presidential system.[5]

### **1.3 The establishment of the Russian super-presidential system**

In 1993, Russia suffered from a constitutional crisis. Yeltsin, then federal president, after the military, suppressed the opposition in the parliament and added the presi-

dent's power in the new constitution in December. The end of Russia's first constitutional period and the birth of the super-presidential system are interrelated.

In 1993, the new constitution established the Russian President in the state power system, the Russian constitution article 80 clear: "the President of the Russian federation is the constitution of the Russian federation, defend the sovereignty of the Russian federation, independence and national integrity, safeguard the organs of state power to exercise functions and mutual cooperation." In practice, the Russian president has the power to dissolve the Duma and propose draft laws, which is equivalent to having legislative power, and he should not be responsible in exercising these powers. [19] Since the Russian president is only responsible to the voters, the principle of separation of powers in a typical presidential country cannot limit its actions. Due to the imperfect political politics and the lack of a strong and effective party system to restrict state leaders, the Russian president actually has unlimited power. Russia's super-presidential system was established during an extraordinary period of the upheaval in Eastern Europe and the collapse of the Soviet Union. At that time, Russia had internal political divisions and serious social unrest, and there were also the supreme Soviet and two opposing regimes with the president and prime minister at the core. The last two regimes faced off openly, triggering the October incident. The 1993 constitutional referendum approved the final establishment of Russia's super-presidential system." [6]

## **2 The French semi-presidential system is identical to the Russian semi-presidential system**

### **2.1 The president has the same position in the power system**

The legal system of the Fifth French Republic belongs to the "continental law system", which is different from the "Anglo-American system". As a country with a clear constitution, the legal system has clear legal provisions that "the president should ensure that the constitution is observed". The president may use arbitration to ensure the normal exercise of the public authority and maintain the continuation of the state. Under the French semi-presidential system, the presidential status is above the three powers. After the promulgation of the new constitution, Russia still adopted legal means to ensure that the president holds the sole power of the state, resulting in the relatively weak parliament and judicial institutions, so that the Russian political system presents the form of "strong government — weak parliament". [7]

From the perspective of the position of the president in the state organ, the power of the presidents of France and Russia in the state power organ is greater than the power of the parliament and the judicial system, so both countries have adopted the political organization system with the executive power of the president as the core. De Gaulle believes that the position of French president should play a central role in the French political system and have a huge influence, and he came to this conclusion when analyzing the psychological and cultural characteristics of the French people. In his ideal design, the French president should play the dual role of displaying the na-

tional image and guiding the national development direction. In this context, it is inevitable that the French president will gain enormous power anyway. As a political role, he does not take any other legal responsibility for his actions. As long as the term is not full, there are no conditions in the Constitution for the impeachment of the president unless he is charged for treason.[15]

From the perspective of the scope of power and political status, the Russian and French presidents have similar roles in legislative, administrative, military, judicial and diplomatic aspects. However, in the current perspective of political development, we can think that this centralization phenomenon does not meet the requirements of modern democratic countries. The Russian president lacks supervision and restriction in the exercise of power, so he only needs to be responsible to the Constitution and citizens, and does not need to be responsible or report to other institutions in the system, which reflects the supreme status of the president in state organs and is at the core of state power like France.

## **2.2 The authority of the president is all the same**

From the perspective of the powers of the president, the presidents of France and Russia have the following additional powers on the basis of the presidential powers stipulated by the presidential system:

The first is the dissolution of the Parliament. The dissolution of parliament actually means that the legislative power cannot limit the president. In France, if there is a conflict between the government and the parliament, the president can dissolve the parliament after consultation with the two speakers and the prime minister. The former French president discusses with the prime minister and the speaker before dissolving the parliament, which is only a link of consultation and consultation. There is no legal or institutional binding force for compulsory adoption. The opinions of the speaker and the prime minister are only for reference. Similarly, the Russian president has the power to unilaterally declare the dissolution or reelection of the State Duma. According to the Russian constitution, the president has the right to dissolve the Duma if it veto three times.

This was followed by a referendum. The referendum is one of the ways that the government bypasses parliamentary control, using the referendum to directly determine the law, demonstrating a special kind of power. A referendum can weaken the influence of the parliament, and free the president from the constraints of the legislature, while strengthening the power of the president. The French and Russian presidents have the right to exercise the right to vote.

Finally, the presidents of the two countries are not only the symbol of the head of state, but also have the powers and responsibilities of the head of government, so as to control the formulation and implementation of public policies of the administrative bodies. France's government policies must involve the president, according to the 1958 constitution, the chairman of the government cabinet meeting by the president. Although the president is not a member of the government, this arrangement clearly shows that the president can control the government and decide on all important issues such as policy making and important personnel appointments. The French presi-

dent, like other presidential countries, has the right to appoint presidents of parliament, heads of government and other ministers. In Russia, although the president is not a member of the government and is not the executive head in the legal sense, the appointment of the prime minister and important department ministers also needs to be recognized by the president, which actually highlights the Russian president's great control over the government. The Russian president has the right to appoint the Prime Minister of the Russian Federation after the election of the State Duma by nomination and recommendation, and also has the right to propose a draft recall, and to dissolve the government and recall the prime minister and other government personnel through meetings or referendum.[16]

Although there are some similarities between the French semi-presidential system and the Russian super-presidential system in terms of presidential status and authority, there are many differences in other ways.

### **3 The difference between the semi-presidential systems and the super-presidential systems**

French and Russian presidents have different powers. Russian presidents have more power, wider coverage, and less restrictions and constraints than French presidents, resulting in less democratic color, and even the Russian Federation is more authoritarian.

First, although both presidents have the power to dissolve the legislature, the French president must previously consult the prime minister and the speaker of both houses of parliament on the matter. When making important national decisions, the president, even if such inquiries are not actually restricted, cannot completely ignore the situation of the Chancellor and the premier, lest being isolated. The Russian president can dissolve the State Duma without consultation. Although the French National Assembly uses a case of no confidence to stand against the president, the constitution has strict rules that make it difficult for impeachment to enforce. When parliament impeaches the government and the president, the president must anticipate the possibility of retaliation from the government, including its dissolution by the president. In Russia, the constitution stipulates that the president has the power to dissolve the Duma under the following circumstances: if the Duma denies the president more than three times or has two or more proposals of distrust of the government in three consecutive months. The dissolution of the Duma did not require the consent of the Prime minister and the Duma, nor discussion or formal consultation, for the only reason that the presidential nomination was not agreed, which highlights the Duma's weak position in the power of the president.

Second, in France, the internal and external policies of the country are determined by the parliament, and the president is the role of implementing parliamentary resolutions. In Russia, in his Union address to the Duma, the president explicitly mentioned the country's policy formulation, future development ideas and plans, including the president's discussion on the state situation and foreign policy guidelines. Based on these contents, the national situation and task plans are evaluated, and the Duma and

the government are required to fully consider and implement them in their legislation and work. In this process, the Duma actually plays a role of confirmation and push, without the actual power to modify and veto.

Third, although the French and Russian constitutions give the president the power to exercise the referendum, the procedures, operations and conditions required for the exercise of such power are not exactly the same. If the French president does not get the support and consent of the parliament and the prime minister before declaring the exercise of the referendum, then the idea will be rejected. But there is no such requirement in Russia. The French constitution states that the power to initiate a civil referendum belongs to the parliament, and the president can only exercise that power. When the president exercises the power of referendum, the parliament should supervise and control, and make suggestions and assistance. Although there is much room for flexibility in the President's use of such power, it needs to be noted that acceptance of parliamentary advice and supervision is the basis for initiating a referendum. The affirmation and support of the parliament and the government is a necessary condition for the president to exercise the power of referendum. According to the Russian constitution, the right of referendum belongs to the presidential power system, and the Law of the Russian Federation requires at least 2 million Russian citizens with referendum to jointly launch a referendum. However, this way of initiation is both complex, and it is difficult to achieve large-scale concerted action in real political life. Therefore, the referendum directly initiated by the citizens only exists in the theory, which is difficult to translate into concrete actions and produce practical results.[18]

Fourth, the decrees and proposals submitted by the French President to the legislature for discussion must be confirmed and signed by the head of government and relevant departments. Only after confirmation by multiple parties can the decree enter the next stage of approval and implementation. But not needed in Russia. The Russian president's order does not cover the rules, and the law does not empower the prime minister and ministers to sign the document. A law approved by the president, once promulgated and implemented, shall have legal effect.

Fifth, Russia is more strict in setting the conditions and procedures for impeachment and removing the president than France, so it is more difficult to implement. In France, if the president is determined to be treason, the National Assembly and Senate can vote publicly to prosecute the president. If the chambers vote is unanimous and decides to prosecute the president, the president's trial will be held by a particular court, and the president will be discharged only after the court has returned a verdict of guilty. It is noteworthy that a referendum failure can also be an unwritten rule of the president's resignation. France had de Gaulle resigned after a referendum, although the rule was not included in the law. So the referendum right is a double-edged sword. The president could use it to dissolve the Congress to ensure that his intentions could be fulfilled, but even if he failed, he would be forced to bear great losses and eventually resign and leave. Russia has strict procedural requirements for the decision to remove the president. More than one third of the Duma representatives must propose and form a special committee to review and discuss the proposals. Then, both the Federal Council and the State Duma must vote more than two-thirds to approve

the proposal. This procedure must be implemented in Russia. Rigorous conditions and complex processes. Basically, this setup looks like something ridiculous.

Sixth, the policy programs of different political parties have a huge impact on the political process of the country. A practical, effective and stable political party system plays a vital role in regulating the power system and maintaining the stability of the political environment. France's political party system is very perfect, and the political party culture is deeply rooted in the country. When the French president is from the same political party as members of the government and the parliamentary majority, their political agreement will help the president successfully push his own policies.[8] Academia will usually the President and members of the government and the parliamentary majority belong to different parties called "right", which requires the President and prime minister and parliamentary representatives as a coalition between different parties, common consultation policy, and on the basis of compromise and cooperation, so that other parties can supervise the behavior of the current government and the President. Russia's multi-party system has only yet been twenty years old. But it is obvious that the system has obvious ideological and artificial features of the design... there is still a big gap in the political landscape of the multiparty system, compared to the mature multiparty system in the West.[9] Russia has always had the problem of insufficient democratic resources, and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the people's thoughts have become chaotic, and the government's ability to monitor the political parties has decreased. Therefore, Russia's political parties are still in a state of disorderly development, and a stable multi-party system pattern has not been formed.[10] The Russian president should get rid of his party status, which makes the party unable to effectively intervene and regulate its leaders. Russia's political parties are actually the organizational basis for the battle for the presidency.”[11] From the above six differences, the Russian president far exceeds the French president in terms of political status, scope of power and degree of freedom. It can be said that the Russian president has truly achieved the "super president".

## **4 Reasons for the difference in polity between Russia and France**

Russia's presidential system is similar to the French semi-presidential system, but the Russian president has significantly more power than the French president and the United States president. So why does Russia have a super-presidential system?

### **4.1 The reasons for the political differences between Russia and France from the root of historical tradition**

In May 1958, the French colony in Algeria suffered a rebellion by the garrison, leading France into a major political crisis. The French people, angry at government change and political unrest, demand a change. De Gaulle took this opportunity to realize the idea of reform in a country with a strong presidential system. But he believes that the instability of the French regime stems from the onerous legislative

power, leading to the executive power becoming a subsidiary. As a result, the government cannot implement coherent policies in daily times, nor take resolute and decisive action to resolve problems in times of crisis. The Constitution of the Fifth Republic limited the legislative power while enhancing the trend of executive power. In the history of Russia, through the five periods of Kiev, Tatar rule, Moscow, Peter the Great and the Soviet, except for the Duchy of Kiev, the centralized political system was implemented.[12] Although the socialist Soviet regime was established after the October Revolution and the introduction of multi-party coalition regime and election system, it gradually evolved into a one-party system and appointment system due to the lag of domestic economic and cultural development and the cruelty of domestic war. By Stalin's time, the political system became more centralized. Because of his outstanding achievements and prestige, Stalin gradually accumulated more power, commanding the party, government and army, pushed the centralization of the Soviet Union to the extreme, and realized the centralization of individual power. Russia has historically tended to personify the country, which has led the Russian people to become accustomed to the strong centralization of the central government. Modern France has no such highly centralized tradition.

#### **4.2 The reasons for the political differences between Russia and France from a practical point of view**

Russia most important needs to maintain social and political stability in the transition process. As it stands, Russia's most pressing need in the transition is to ensure social and political stability. Since the beginning of the political and economic reform, Russia's economy has suffered a crisis, political turmoil and social chaos, resulting in the weakening of national strength, the reduction of people's living standards, and the law and order out of control. The Russians fell into historical fatigue. People have an urgent need for social order and stability, so the government needs to reach a political agreement, operate efficiently and have authority. In times of disputes over domestic and foreign affairs, Russia urgently needs a strong leader to lead the reform to ensure social stability and improve people's living standards. In the current political, economic and social environment of Russia, strongman politics and authoritarian politics have deep public support. The personal charm of an excellent leader has a positive impact on maintaining the stability and balance of social psychology, social economy and social life.

#### **4.3 The reasons for the difference between Russia and France in terms of external factors**

The establishment of the Russian presidential system is a major reform of the country's political system, and external pressure is one of the drivers of this change. The change of hands in western countries and eastern European countries has played an important external role in promoting the transformation of Russia's political system. In order to realize the plan to achieve the goal of "democratizing" the Soviet Union and Russia, the US government has adopted a number of policy initiatives, including



active support for opposition forces and individuals who advocate for democracy. Other countries also seized the opportunity of Russia's ideological vacuum and economic dilemma to sell it neoclassical economics and democratic politics. Russia's democratic system comes from outside introduction, so it cannot immediately reach the democratic level of western countries, so the Russian presidential system has some characteristics of an authoritarian regime.[13]

## 5 Conclusions

Although the power of the French president is great, it is influenced by the cultural tradition, the rule of law thought and political practice, and is exercised under the norms of the system. The key to distinguishing between Russia's super-presidential system and the typical French semi-presidential system is the understanding of the word "super". In politics, "super" means full power, but this is not a praised word. The academic community should keep a calm attitude towards the Russian super-presidential system.[17] For important countries such as Russia, their own power system should be regulated, especially avoiding the impact of the president's personal will on domestic and foreign policies. This ensures that national planning and development proceed along a sustainable and predictable long-term route. From a global perspective, this is crucial to China's strategic and diplomatic relations around its neighborhood, peace and development in Northeast Asia, and the tranquility and stability of the international community.[14]

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