

Committee Election and Rotation

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Abstract

Can committee election and rotation (CER) for public office supplement formal terms and term limits to achieve more frequent office rotation without incurring, to the same extent, the associated turnover costs of a term limit set to the equivalent length? This paper provides a theoretical description of CER where two or more individuals are elected to serve individual terms for the same public office, with the exclusive right to exercise the public office rotating amongst the committee members at intervals shorter than the term length. CER would be most likely to emerge among a factional electorate, as CER would enable shorter rotations in office to be achieved without lower turnover costs. A case study of three high-level public offices using CER in the Republic of Venice, controlled by factional patricians, provides evidence of the historical structure and operation of CER. The tripartite presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina is examined as a modern day application of CER among a factional electorate.

Keywords: Public Choice; Term Limits; Venice; Economic History

JEL Codes: D7; H1

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1. Introduction

Electoral competition in representative democracies typically entails an electorate voting for an individual to represent them in a public office for a specified term. This standard structure of electoral representation has been used both historically and modernly as a primary institution to enable a citizenry to hold public officeholders accountable, generate peaceful rotation in office, and to prevent political entrenchment and tyranny.¹

Historical and modern experience demonstrates, however, that electoral representation isn't sufficient to obtain these goals, especially among a factional electorate. Public choice problems plague the principal-agent structure of representative democracy, necessitating additional governance mechanisms.² These problems are exacerbated among a factional electorate. While quality institutions that protect the rule of law can mitigate factional conflict, low levels of trust and thus social networks, typical of factional societies, make it difficult to establish quality formal and informal institutions.³

Term limits are often used by electorates, in combination with a broader array of mechanisms, such as constitutions, checks and balances, freedom of the press, and transparency, to help achieve the goals of representative democracy.⁴ According to the conflict theory of term limits, the primary benefit of term limits is that they increase rotation in office. Especially among

¹ See Barro (1973), Besley (2006), Congleton (2007), Ferejohn (1986), Fukuyama (2011), Levinson and Sachs (2015), Maravall (2003), North, Wallis, and Weingast (2009), Tilly (2004), and Voigt (1999).

² For the public choice problems inherent in electoral representation, see Acemoglu and Robinson (2006), Acemoglu et al. (2013), Achen and Bartels (2016), Bardhan (1997), Besley (2006, Ch. 2), Brennan (2011). Buchanan and Tullock (1999), Caplan (2007), Downs (1957), Drazen (2000, pp. 23-30), Holcombe and Gwartney (1989, p. 669-70), Gelman et al. (2009), Mueller (2003), Olson (1982), Sappington (1991), Somin (2013), and Vanberg and Buchanan (2001). For a critique of these public choice problems, and a defense of electoral representation, see Dahl (1989), Udehn (1996), and Wittman (1995).

³ See Alesina, Baquir, and Easterly (1999), Alesina et al. (2003), Coyne (2008), Easterly (2001), Kaldor and Vejevoda (1997), Mansfield and Snyder (1995 & 2005), North et al. (2009), Putnam (1993), Rabushka and Shepsle (1972), Warren (1999), Williamson (2009), Zakaria (1997 & 2003).

⁴ See Bender and Lott Jr. (1996), Lopez (2003), Saint-Paul et al. (2016), Smart and Sturm (2013), and Tabarrok (1994) on term limits. See Brennan and Buchanan (2000), Buchanan (2001), and Hayek (1960) on constitutions and the rule of law, Coyne and Leeson (2009) on freedom of the press, and Stiglitz (2002) on transparency.

a factional electorate, the possibility of an opposing group having the right to execute the power of an office for an extended period may prevent an electorate from agreeing upon and supporting governance institutions. This is especially true among an electorate particularly concerned with the threat of political entrenchment and tyranny from opposing factions. Thus, it is easier for a factional electorate to agree upon and support governance institutions if periodic rotation of office is ensured through term limits and pre-determined electoral rules.

Yet, the achievable benefits of rotation in office provided by terms and term limits are constrained by the turnover costs of rotation in office. Turnover costs primarily consist of electoral costs and the costs associated with replacing experienced officeholders with inexperienced officeholders. Both of these cost increase as terms and term limits are shortened to achieve increased rotation in office.

This paper advances an additional governance mechanism, committee election and rotation (CER). CER could help a factional electorate realize the benefits of short rotations in office without incurring, to the same extent, the turnover costs that would be associated with an equivalent term and term limit regime. Rather than elect a single individual to serve a term in a public office, individuals could be elected to serve a term on a committee, with the public office rotating among the members of the committee at intervals shorter than the term. In combination with term limits, CER would ensure increased rotation in office.

Similar to the conflict theory of term limits, CERs would be most likely to emerge among a factional electorate. This paper does not advance CERs as a panacea for resolving ethnic conflict or achieving the goals of representative democracy. Rather, this paper more modestly submits CERs as another possible electoral mechanism that can be used to generate agreement and support for governance institutions in factional societies.

This paper provides a historic case study of three high-level public offices in the Republic of Venice to provide evidence of the structure and operation of CER in practice. Middle Age and Renaissance Venice was governed by factional patrician families holding an inveterate fear of tyranny and the abuse of office. The positions of the Chairman of the Savii Grandi, the Chiefs of the Council of Ten, and Mint Masters all operated on the basis of CER. The Savii Grandi was a committee of six patricians elected to six-month terms with the powerful office of Chairman of the Savii Grandi rotating amongst the members of the committee at one-week intervals. The Council of Ten was a committee of ten patricians elected to one-year terms with the offices of the three Chiefs of the Council of Ten rotating amongst the members of the council at one-month intervals. Operators for each government mint in Venice were elected, depending on the time period examined, to one- or two-year terms with the position of Mint Master, holding exclusive minting authority, rotating amongst themselves, depending on the time period examined, at two-week to two-month intervals.

A case study of Bosnia and Herzegovina provides a modern example of CER in operation. Bosnia, Herzegovina, and Srpska were joined together in 1995 with a CER presidency. Every four years three individuals, one Bosniak, one Croat, and one Serb, are elected to a committee with the exclusive right to exercise the office, the Chairpersonship of the Presidency, rotating amongst the three members of the presidency committee every eight months.

The rest of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides a theoretical description of CER and its implications. Section 3 details the structure and operation of committee election and office rotation as practiced in Middle Age and Renaissance Venice. Section 4 provides a modern

day application of CER in presidential elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Section 5 concludes.

2. Committee Election and Office Rotation

The primary purpose of term limits is to increase rotation in office (Ginsburg et al. 2011; Maltz 2007; Petracca 2006). While several contending explanations for why increased rotation in office, achieved through term limits, specifically improves electoral representation, most of these theories implicitly depend on the assumption that incumbency is an exogenous rather than an endogenous choice of the electorate (Friedman and Wittman 1996; Lopez 2003; Tabarrok 1994; 1996).⁵ For instance, if long tenures are suboptimal, and a majority of the electorate recognizes this, then term limits are unnecessary since it would already be in the electorate's best interest to vote long-standing incumbents out of office. Dick and Lott (1993) advance a theory of term limits that overcomes this problem by recognizing that there is a collective action problem faced by an electorate associated with the benefits of having one's representative hold relative seniority in a representative legislative body (also see Lopez 2002). Yet, the collective action theory can't explain term limits for positions representing an entire electorate (i.e. a president of a country or a mayor of city) or explain unilateral impositions of term limits (i.e. why states unilaterally impose term limits on their federal legislators) (Friedman and Wittman 1996; Glaeser 1997; Lopez 2003; Tabarrok 1994; 1996).

An alternative theory for term limits, which doesn't suffer from this theoretical weakness, is that term limits can mitigate conflict among a factional electorate by increasing rotation in office (Friedman and Wittman 1996; Glaeser 1997; Tabarrok 1994 & 1996). According to the

⁵ For a more comprehensive review of the literature on term limits see Bender and Lott (1996), Lopez (2003), and Tabarrok (1994).

conflict theory of term limits, short tenures are desired by factional electorates for three reasons. First, shortening allowable tenure in office limits the ability of all factions to excessively exploit the power of the office. Factional electorates have good reason to fear long tenures in office. For instance, Zakaria (1997, 35-6) writes,

Elections require that politicians compete for peoples' votes. In societies without strong traditions of multiethnic groups or assimilation, it is easiest to organize support along racial, ethnic, or religious lines. Once an ethnic group is in power, it tends to exclude other ethnic groups. Compromise seems impossible.... Political competition that is so divisive can rapidly degenerate into violence. Opposition movements, armed rebellions, and coups in Africa have often been directed against ethnically based regimes, many of which came to power through elections.

Second, short rotations in office among a factional electorate reduce the cost of waiting for your faction to have an opportunity to come back in power. By rotating the benefits of office according to pre-determined electoral rules, out-of-power factions, rather than attempting to undermine governance institutions, will have the incentive to focus on preparing candidates for the next election (Ginsburg et al. 2011). Third, short rotations in office provide the opportunity for more broadly sharing the benefits of an office among the major factions. Thus, a factional electorate is more likely to agree upon and support governance institutions if term limits providing for periodic rotation of office are included in the set of pre-determined electoral rules.

The benefits of rotation in office, however, are limited by the turnover costs associated with shortened tenures. Turnover costs include electoral costs and the costs of officeholder inexperience, both of which increase as terms and term limits are shortened to achieve increased rotation in office.⁶

⁶ In addition to these costs, shorter term limits also raise the costs of policy uncertainty and volatility. We do not address these costs since it is not obvious that CER would be better or worse at mitigating these costs compared to shorter term limits.

The primary electoral cost that can be expected to increase as tenure length is shortened is voter fatigue (Augenblick and Nicholson 2016; Rallings, Thrasher and Borisjuk 2003).⁷ Elections impose attentional and epistemic burdens on an electorate. As the frequency of elections increases, these attentional and epistemic costs will increase, further decreasing the incentive for voters to make informed decisions and, thereby, further decreasing the quality of electoral monitoring and feedback. In addition, the costs of operating, securing, and monitoring elections can also be expected to increase with the frequency of elections. Other associated electoral costs that can be expected to increase with the frequency of elections would also include the opportunity costs of voting (i.e., more time at work) and even the potential increases in driving fatalities as voters make more frequent trips to voting stations (Redelmeier 2008).

The costs of officeholder inexperience include the costs associated with replacing experienced incumbents with inexperienced officeholders (Adams and Kenny 1986). For instance, Depalo et al. (2015, Ch. 6) argue that term limits substantially reduce the experience and institutional memory of officeholders (also see Cohen and Spitzer 1992 and Hyneman 1938). While the cost of term limits on officeholder inexperience is difficult to measure since many U.S. term limits provide for tenures longer than legislators naturally serve in public office (Moncrief et al. 2004; Squire 2007), as term limits are shortened they will become binding and begin to reduce the experience of officeholders.

Setting optimal tenure length then involves minimizing both the costs of long tenures and turnover costs (Adams and Kenny 1986). For a conflictual society, however, the benefits of term limits may not be fully realizable due to the turnover costs that increase as tenures are shortened. For instance, both electoral costs and the costs of inexperienced officeholders are likely to be

⁷ Voter fatigue is not to be confused with incumbent party fatigue, which increases with term length (Bartels and Zaller 2001; Mayhew 2008).

quite high for societies with a factional electorate and thus impose a strict lower-bound on the achievable benefits of office rotation.

CER, in combination with term limits, can be used to increase the rotation of office among a factional electorate without incurring, to the same extent, the costs that would be associated with equivalent terms. CER is a distinct type of an electoral committee.⁸ One comprised of members that are elected or appointed in order to have a single office rotate amongst the members of the committee at specified intervals shorter than the term length. For instance, three individuals could be elected to a committee for three-year terms, with the public office rotating amongst themselves at shorter intervals, such as every three-months. The specific method in which members are appointed or elected, the size of the committee, as well as the size and nature of the electorate, will, of course, have a substantial impact on the composition and outcome of the committee (Dove et al. 2018; McGarrity 2006; Volker 2017).

CER would enable the benefits of shorter tenures to be realized without incurring, to the same extent, the costs associated with setting equivalent shorter terms. Thus, quicker rotations in office could be obtained without increasing electoral costs and the costs associated with more inexperienced officeholders to the same extent as would setting a term limit to the same length as the rotation period.

⁸ The election of committees, where several individuals hold joint decision-making power under majority rule (a “directorial system”), has also been advanced and tried as a possible solution to the principal agent problems inherent in electoral representation (Beniers and Swank 2004; Black 1958; Feld and Grofman 1986). Both the early Roman Republic, with two consuls serving jointly as magistrate (Brennan 2000, 12-4; Beck et al. 2011), and modern-day Switzerland, with their seven-member Federal Council operating under majority rule (Hug and Schulz 2007; Wolff and Karagök 2012), offer examples of directorial systems in operation. Directorial systems do face a unique host of unique public choice problems, primarily due to the fact that, with joint decision-making, responsibility does not fall on any one individual (Black 1958; Casella et al. 2017; Farquharson 1969; Gao and Jun 2018; Miller 1995; Shepsle and Weingast 1987; Schulte 2012).

CER would improve electoral representation in factional societies in five primary ways.⁹ First, CER would enable shorter rotations in office without incurring, to the same extent, the increased electoral costs associated with setting equivalently shorter term limits. Second, CER would increase rotation in office while still enabling officeholders to accumulate and utilize experience, benefits which would be forfeited with equivalent terms and term limits. Terms and term limits can, of course, be utilized in combination with CER to still put a strict upper-bound on the allowable tenure of office to prevent political entrenchment and tyranny. Third, short rotations in office shared by several members of a committee, especially if they diverged ideologically, would increase the costs of “buying” an office or rent-seeking, possibly reducing the incentives for these behaviors. For instance, decreasing tenure length may reduce the incentives for office seekers to buy an office (Crain and Tollison 1977; Kermit and Lott, Jr. 1997; Saint-Paul, Ticchi and Vindigni 2016; Smart and Sturm 2013). Fourth, more frequent rotation in a public position in a CER system, might also provide additional peer-monitoring and oversight. For instance, there is some limited evidence that rotation in office can reduce corruption and improve oversight by providing the opportunity for peer monitoring (Bayar 2013; Cason et al. 2012; Chan, Farrell, and Healy 2014; Gershokov et al. 2009; Kwon, Lim, and Simnett 2014; Schelker 2013; Stiglitz 1990). This is contingent, however, on the diversity of the committee members (Beniers and Swank 2004; Bulkley, Myles, and Pearson 2001; Sunstein 2003). Fifth, especially if committee member elections were staggered, CER may also offer opportunities for inter-cohort learning, even for non-legislative public offices, such as presidents

⁹ Another possible argument to make in support of CER’s is that, by enabling short rotations in office, it would make it more feasible for citizens holding private-sector employment (as opposed to career politicians) to pursue and hold office. While there are many popular arguments advanced for the benefits of citizen officeholders (Bandow 1995 & 1996; Coyne and Fund 1992; Will 1993), there is little evidence to support the theory (Garrett 1996; Osborne and Slivinski 1996; Owings and Borck 2000; Payne 1991; Reed and Schansberg 1993).

or mayors. For instance, Cohen and Spitzer (1992 & 1996) find that, at least in legislative assemblies, staggered elections can contribute to the transmission of knowledge. Without a CER system, however, this inter-cohort learning is limited to legislative assemblies.

3. The Republic of Venice

The Republic of Venice during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance was governed by factional patrician families who held a deep distrust of each other (Bouwsma, 1968, 149-150; Davis 1994; Gioia 2007; Lane 1966, 297; Lane 1973, 110-111; Muir 1981, 280; Norwich 1982, 282).¹⁰ The patricians crafted many unique governance institutions and mechanisms to restrain political ambition and mitigate conflict (De Lara 2008; De Lara, Greif, and Jha 2008; Puga and Trefler 2014). These governance mechanisms included complicated electoral procedures and strict terms and term limits, or even informal term limits based on a candidates age, on nearly every public office (Smith et al. 2018). As Finlay (1980, 31-2) writes, “the laws regulating electoral procedures were aimed at eliminating ambition and faction from public service” and were designed to “sift special interests, whether personal, familial, or factional, from competition from office.”

Yet, in addition to terms and term limits, the patricians also utilized CER systems, which we will describe in this section, for several of the highest-level positions with the most opportunity for factional exploitation. Especially with their complicated electoral process, which was time-consuming (Bouwsma 1968, 229; Finlay 1980, 141-3; Lane 1973, 113; Madden 2012, 171-8; Norwich 1982, 167 & 506), CER enabled short rotations in office without the increased turnover costs of shorter terms and term limits.

¹⁰ There is also evidence to suggest that non-patricians had deep-seated factions (Davis 1994, 1996, & 1998; Ruggiero 1980).

In whole, the governance institutions of Venice were successful. Relative to the rest of the Europe during this time, they were prosperous (De Long and Shleifer 1993, Epstein 2000 90-3; Trentmann 2016, 28) and successful in warding off tyranny and succession conflict (Smith et al. 2018). Additionally, they became widely known for maintaining an equitable system of justice (Finer 1999, 1008; Fink 1962, 31) and a reliable currency (Stahl 2000, 3). The Venetian system of CER for powerful positions likely helped contribute to these successes. More importantly, however, CER enabled Venice's factional electorate to agree upon and support governance institutions.

3.1 Chairman of the Savii Grandi

The Savii Grandi were a six-person committee created in approximately 1400 to serve as the ranking members of the Collegio committee which set the agenda for the Senate of Venice (Findlay 1980, xv-xvi; Finer 1999, 1004; Lane 1973, 254).¹¹ The Savii Grandi were considered to be the ministers of the Republic of Venice and held the agenda-setting power for the Collegio (Lane 1973, 256). The Savii Grandi were members of the Great Council (the full governing body of Venice comprised of all the elite patricians above the age of 25) elected by the Senate.¹² The elected members of the Savii Grandi served staggered, six-month terms (Lane 1973, 256). While there were no limit on the number of terms they could serve as a Savii Grandi, immediately after serving a term as a Savii Grandi, patricians were prohibited from serving again in that position for six-months (De Vivo 2007, 39 n136).

¹¹ The Collegio was also comprised of the Savii agli Ordini who were the ministers of maritime affairs, the Savii da Terra Firma who were the ministers of the military, and the Signoria, a council comprised of the doge, six ducal councilors, and the three Chiefs of the Forty (Norwich 1982, 283; Lane 1973, 254-5).

¹² The Senate was comprised of 60 senators elected by the Great Council, 60 senators recommended by those 60 senators and approved by the Great Council (referred to as the Zonta), the Court of Forty (the supreme criminal court of Venice), and ex-officio magistrates (Findlay 1980, xvi; Norwich 1982, 283).

The chairman of the Savii Grandi was a position with considerable authority and influence (Finer 1999, 1004). Norwich (1982, 283) describes it as being “effectively Prime Minister of the Republic [of Venice].” Given the patricians’ concern with the abuse of authority in such a powerful position, the patricians rotated the chairmanship of the Savii Grandi among its members at one-week intervals (Norwich 1982, 283).

3.2 Chiefs of the Ten

The Council of Ten, introduced in 1310, became one of the most powerful committees in all of Venice (Ferraro 2012, 55 & 67; Finer 1999, 1006; Fink 1962, 30-1). The Council of Ten oversaw the internal and external security of the Venetian republic, including intelligence, public safety, policing, and also maintained some judicial and executive authority (Davis 1994; De Vivo 2007, 33-6; Ferraro 2012, 55; Pullen 1971, 24; Rose 1974, 484; Winchell 2006). The Council of Ten held an exclusive authority to exercise its power expediently outside the normal decision-making process whenever a security threat emerged (Davis 1994, 146). Given that the security threats they responded to often involved refereeing factional disputes, the Council of Ten held substantial power (Davis 1994, 146-7 & 60).

The ten members of the Council of Ten were members of the Great Council elected directly by the Great Council (Bouswma 1968, 61; Fink 1962, 31; Finlay 1980, xv & 40; Horodowich 2009, 104; Norwich 1982, 498; Ruggiero 1980, 7-10).¹³ To ensure diversity on the council, laws prevented any patrician family from having more than one member of their family on the council (Lane 1973, 116). Each council member served

¹³ The Council of Ten meetings always had the doge and his six ducal councilors present, so the committee was effectively comprised of 17 members (Ferraro 2012, 55; Norwich 1982, 282).

staggered (in groups) one-year terms. Subsequent terms were prohibited (Finer 1999, 1006; Fink 1962, 32; Lane 1973, 116-7).

Three members of the Council of Ten served as chairman, or *Capi*. *Capi* held considerable power above the rest of the council. For instance, *Capi* were automatically included in the exclusive “inner circle” of governing officials, while the remainder of the Council of Ten were considered to be in the next layer of governance (Lane 1973, 257). Finer (1999, 1006) compares the position of *Capi* to that of a “presidency.” Given the substantial political influence that *Capi* held, the three *Capi* positions rotated at one-month intervals among the council members. As an additional precaution, *Capi* were also required to remain in the Ducal Palace for the entire length of their month rotation in order to prevent outside influence and corruption (Lane 1973, 116; Norwich 1989, 283; Winchell 2006, 340).

3.3 Mint Masters

The Republic of Venice maintained mints for taking in unrefined silver or gold from merchants for refining and coining (Stahl 2000, 248). Given the “primitive” nature of the technology at that time for assessing and measuring the quality of silver and gold, there was substantial room for fraud and theft throughout the process (Stahl 2000, 250).

To prevent fraud and theft, the operation of each mint was controlled by teams with two to three individuals, elected to one- to two-year terms (depending on the time period) by the Great Council (Stahl 2000, 246-8). The office of Mint Master rotated among these three individuals for a period of time between two weeks and two months (depending on the time period) (Stahl 2000, 247). At the end of each period, the serving Mint Master had to prepare accounts which would be verified by the next serving mint master, as well as other officials (Stahl 2000, 258). To provide additional assurances, each mint master had a unique mark for the

coins made during their tenure so that they would know “who was responsible for any shortfall in fineness, weight, or appearance” (Stahl 2000, 251). The other one or two members of the team, who were not actively serving as Mint Master, did have occasional duties if the need arose. For instance, they would, in times of need, serve as Associate Master and Third Master. Serving as Associate or Third Master largely involved mediating any dispute between the Mint Master and the weighers (a separately elected position in charge of measuring the gold or silver as it came in, as well as checking the weight and fineness of newly minted coins) (Stahl 2000, 257).

4. Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁴

Following a war of independence from Yugoslavia beginning in 1992, the combined Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Serb Republic were established to bring their factional ethnic/religious groups together under a centralized state in 1995. The population of this central state held three primary ethnic/religious groups, the Bosniacs (predominately Muslim), the Serbs (predominately Serbian Orthodox), and the Croats (predominately Roman Catholic). In 1991, right before the eve of their war, Bosniacs represented 43.7 percent of the combined population, Serbs represented 31.4 percent, and Croats made up 17.3 percent, with the remaining 7.6 percent being primarily Yugoslavian, Roma, and Jewish (Hertić, Šapčanin, and Woodward 2000, 316; Nardelli and Dzidic 2014).¹⁵

Important to the establishment of this centralized state among these factional groups, the centralized governance institutions (Bosnia and Herzegovina) were designed specifically to be extremely weak, with the Bosniac and Bosnian Croat Federation and, separately, the Serb

¹⁴ Tabarrok (1994 & 1996) provides the first analysis of this unique rotation system in Bosnia and Herzegovina as an example of the benefits of rotation in office introduced by term limits.

¹⁵ 2013 estimates put Bosniaks at 50.1 percent, Serbs at 30.8 percent, and Croats at 15.4 percent (Central Intelligence Agency).

Republic maintaining a large degree of autonomy (Berdal et al. 2011, 3; Hertić et al. 2000, 318; Nardelli and Dzidic 2014). The responsibilities of the combined Bosnia and Herzegovina centralized state are limited to “foreign policy, customs policy, monetary policy, immigration and asylum policies, air traffic control, payment of international financial obligations (incurred with the consent of both entities); enforcement of state-level legislation; and interentity transport, communications, and energy infrastructure” (Hertić et al. 2000, 318). The central state of Bosnia and Herzegovina was even designed to lack an independent source of financial support, with the centralized government entirely relying on transfers from the Bosniac and Bosnian Croat Federation and the Serb Republic (Hertić et al. 2000, 318).

Executive decision-making authority in the centralized state of Bosnia and Herzegovina is exercised by a president and a Council of Ministers.¹⁶ The presidency rotates among a three-person presidency committee at eight month intervals. Each committee member is elected every four years (un-staggered).¹⁷ The three members are each elected by their separate ethnic/religious groups (the Bosniacs, the Croats, and the Serbs) to represent them and thereby ensure diversity on the committee.¹⁸ The Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 set up the initial tripartite presidency system, but left the decision of how to select the chair of the committee to serve as president, whether “rotation or otherwise,” up to the parliament, which compromised on an eight-month rotation.

¹⁶ The president appoints the Chair of the Council of Ministers, with approval from the National House of Representatives. The Chair then appoints the remaining ministers for each department (Nardelli and Dzidic 2014).

¹⁷ The Dayton Peace Accords set the term for the first members of the presidency to two years with the term moving to four years thereafter.

¹⁸ While Lebanon’s governance system does not utilize CER, it did include similar diversity guarantees to get a factional electorate to agree and support their governance institutions, with the President being a Maronite Christian, the Speaker of the Parliament a Shi’a Muslim, and the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim.

The previous constitution for Yugoslavia, established in 1974, provided for an eight-member presidential committee (Burg 1983, 243-4; O’Brein 2010, 333).¹⁹ While the 1974 constitution provided that the chairmanship of the presidential committee would rotate among the members of the committee, this never occurred since, initially, the Presidency Committee operated as a collective entity with ceremonial rotation of the Presidency of the Presidency Committee (Burg 1983, 244). This was soon followed by Josip Broz Tito declaring himself president for life until his death in 1980 (O’Brein 2010).²⁰

The Dayton Peace Accord was signed by the Presidents of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Serbia. The participant and agreement of the leaders of each of these groups was vital for the success of the new government. The CER system likely played an important compromising role in getting each of these factional groups to agree to a centralized government (O’Brien 2010). While the Bosnia and Herzegovina presidency committee is frequently criticized for institutionalizing and continuing, rather than resolving away, ethnic fractionalization, it did bring an end to the war and enable these factional groups to agree to a set of governance institutions (O’Brein 2010). While Bosnia and Herzegovina still suffers from ongoing violence and factional conflict, relative to the violence seen in other post-conflict societies, violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina “has remained comparatively low” (Berdal et al. 2011, 3).²¹

¹⁹ The history of a presidential executive committee, including with some limited rotation elements, can be traced even further back in Yugoslavia’s history and likely emerged out of the communist system of central party leadership (Benson 2004; Burg 1983). For instance, prior to the 1974 reforms, the Presidency was collectively held by 29 party members (Burg 1983, 243).

²⁰ Just as with terms and term limits on executives (Acemoglu et al. 2013; Baturo 2014; Corrales and Penfold 2014; Maltz 2007; Gingsburg et al. 2011), the threat of an ambitious executive disbanding the rotational system remains is a weakness of CER systems on executives. Uniquely, Venetian patricians did not utilize CERs (or terms or term limits) for their executive position, the doge. Instead, they overwhelmingly elected elderly candidates, close to death, to the dogeship to informally, and bindingly, term limit their executive (Smith et al. 2018).

²¹ Troop levels and foreign aid are contending explanations for the decline in violence in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Latif 2005), but there is systematic evidence on the failure of these two factors in other contexts (Coyne 2008; Easterly 2006).

5. Conclusion

This paper has advanced a theoretical description of CER as an additional governance mechanism to supplement terms and term limits. While decreasing allowable tenure lengths using terms and term limits can improve ideological rotation in office, they also necessarily increase turnover costs. These turnover costs consist of both the electoral costs and the costs of having more inexperienced officeholders.

CER, where a committee is elected with the exclusive right to exercise a public office is rotated among the committee members at regular intervals, enables electorates to achieve increased rotation in office without incurring, to the same extent, the turnover costs that would be associated with setting an equivalent term and term limit. CERs would be most likely to emerge among a factional electorate where increased rotations in office would enable factional groups to agree to and support governance institutions.

This paper provided three historic examples of the structure and operation of CER in the Republic of Venice where factional patrician families were skeptical of the threat of other groups exploiting political power against them. In addition, this paper provided a modern case study of CER in operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Future research can explore additional applications of committee election and office rotation for public positions and also explore how CER selection mechanisms, CER size, and the size and nature of the electorate will influence the outcomes of a CER regime.

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