isters in parliamentary government, also serves as ceremonial head of state. Because both president and legislature are elected for a fixed term, neither can bring down the other, giving each institution some autonomy.

This separation of powers is the hallmark of the presidential system and is typically reinforced by a separation of personnel. Members of the executive cannot sit in the assembly, creating further distance between the two institutions. Similarly, legislators must resign their seats if they wish to serve in the government, meaning the president’s ability to buy members’ votes with the promise of a job is self-limiting.

Contrasting methods of election create a natural difference of interests. Legislators depend only on the support of voters in their home district, while the president (and the president only) is elected by a broader constituency – typically, the country at large. This divergence generates the political dynamic whereby the president pursues a national agenda against special and local interests in the legislature.

**Figure 16.1 Presidential government**

Presidential government divides power between president and legislature. This distinction is achieved by separate election, as shown, and also by separate survival – the president cannot dissolve the legislature and the legislature can only remove the president through impeachment.

So, despite the focus on a single office, presidential government divides power. The system creates a requirement for the executive to negotiate with the legislature and, by this mechanism, seeks to ensure the triumph of deliberation over dictatorship.

Presidential government predominates in the Americas. It is entrenched not only in the United States, but also throughout Latin America. We must begin with the USA, where the format emerged, but we will then turn to Brazil as a more typical example.

**United States**

When the framers of the American constitution met in Philadelphia in 1787, the issue of the executive created a dilemma. On the one hand, the Founding Fathers wanted to avoid anything that might prove to be a ‘foetus of monarchy’. After all, the American Revolution had just rid the new nation of England’s George III. On the other hand, many delegates agreed with Founding Father Alexander Hamilton that a single executive was needed for ‘decision, activity, secrecy and dispatch’. Eventually, the founders settled on the presidency, an office capable of providing prompt action for a republic in which Congress was, nonetheless, expected to play the leading role.

But how should the occupant of this new, non-monarchical chief executive be selected? Here, the delegates were less clear. Somewhat late in the proceedings, they agreed to select the president through an Electoral College whose members would be appointed by state legislatures. So, the framers had stumbled across an essential feature of presidential government: separate election of executive and legislature.

The founders were not, however, prepared to embrace direct election. On the contrary, one purpose of the Electoral College was to insulate the choice of president from influence by the ‘excitable masses’. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that the national vote has become far more important than the delegates intended. The College has become a mechanical device for allocating College votes; each state has a specific number of College votes which, Maine and Nebraska excepted, go to the leading presidential candidate in that state’s election. So, the College is not the site of decision imagined by the framers. Still, it remains possible