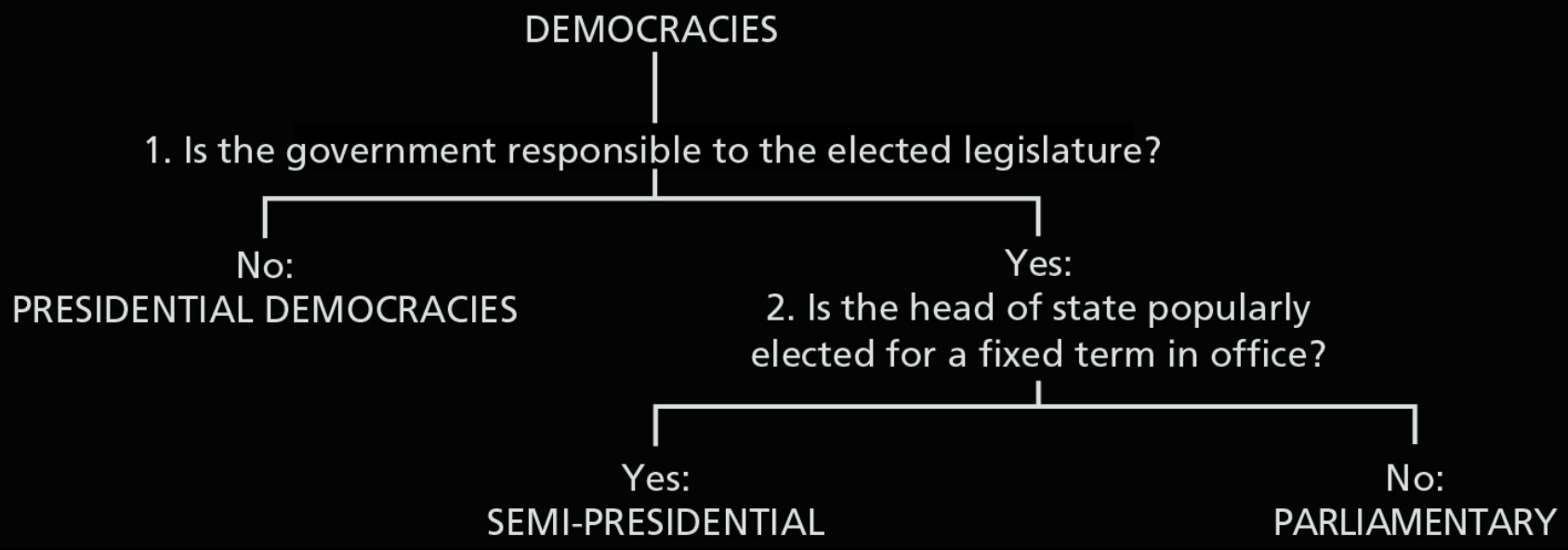
Parliamentary, Presidential and Semi-Presidential Democracies

Democracies are often classified according to the form of government that they have:

- Parliamentary
- Presidential
- Semi-Presidential

FIGURE 12.1 **Classifying Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies**



Legislative responsibility refers to a situation in which a legislative majority has the constitutional power to remove a government from office *without cause*.

A vote of no confidence is initiated by the legislature – the government must resign if it fails to obtain a legislative majority.

A constructive vote of no confidence must indicate who will replace the government if the incumbent loses a vote of no confidence.

A vote of no confidence is initiated by the legislature – the government must resign if it fails to obtain a legislative majority.

A constructive vote of no confidence must indicate who will replace the government if the incumbent loses a vote of no confidence.

A vote of confidence is initiated by the government – the government must resign if it fails to obtain a legislative majority.

The defining feature of presidential democracies is that they do not have legislative responsibility.

- US Government Shutdown, click here

In contrast, parliamentary and semi-presidential democracies both have legislative responsibility.

- PM Question Time (UK), click here

In addition to legislative responsibility, semi-presidential democracies also have a head of state who is popularly elected for a fixed term.

A head of state is popularly elected if she is elected through a process where voters either (i) cast a ballot directly for a candidate or (ii) they cast ballots to elect an electoral college, whose sole purpose is to elect the head of state.

To serve a fixed term means that the head of state serves for a fixed period of time before she needs to be reappointed and cannot be removed in the meantime.

In a democracy, the head of state is either a monarch or a president.

Presidents can exist in presidential, semi-presidential, and parliamentary democracies.

Monarchs only exist in parliamentary democracies – they do not serve fixed terms and they are not directly elected.

Presidential: Democracies in which the government does not depend on a legislative majority to exist are presidential.

Parliamentary: Democracies in which the government depends on a legislative majority to exist and in which the head of state is not popularly elected for a fixed term are parliamentary.

Semi-Presidential: Democracies in which the government depends on a legislative majority to exist and in which the head of state is popularly elected for a fixed term are semi-presidential.

Map 12.1 **Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies around the World in 2015**

Table 12.1 Parliamentary, Presidential, and Semi-Presidential Democracies, 2015

Parliamentary	Presidential	Semi-Presidential
Albania, Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Australia, Bahamas, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bhutan, Canada, Denmark, Dominica, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Guyana, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Moldova, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Spain, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu, United Kingdom, Vanuatu	Argentina, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Burundi, Chile, Colombia, Comoros, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Ghana, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Maldives, Mexico, Micronesia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Palau, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Sierra Leone, South Korea, Suriname, Switzerland, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela	Armenia, Austria, Bulgaria, Cape Verde, Croatia, Czech Republic, Finland, France, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, Iceland, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Macedonia, Madagascar, Mali, Mongolia, Niger, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Romania, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Timor-Leste, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Zambia

Parliamentary Democracies

The government in a parliamentary democracy comprises a prime minister and the cabinet.

The prime minister is the political chief executive and head of the government.

The cabinet is composed of ministers whose job it is to be in the cabinet and head the various government departments.

In a parliamentary democracy, the executive branch and the government are the same thing.

Table 12.2 Canadian Government in November 2015

Minister	Department
Justin Trudeau	Prime Minister/Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Youth
Ralph Goodale	Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness
Lawrence MacAulay	Agriculture and Agri-Food
Stéphane Dion	Foreign Affairs
John McCallum	Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship
Carolyn Bennett	Indigenous and Northern Affairs
Scott Brison	President of the Treasury Board
Dominic LeBlanc	Leader of the Government in the House of Commons
Navdeep Bains	Innovation, Science and Economic Development
William Francis Morneau	Finance
Jody Wilson-Raybould	Justice / Attorney General of Canada
Judy Foote	Public Services and Procurement
Chrystia Freeland	International Trade
Jane Philpott	Health
Jean-Yves Duclos	Families, Children and Social Development
Marc Garneau	Transport
Marie-Claude Bibeau	International Development and La Francophonie
James Gordon Carr	Natural Resources
Mélanie Joly	Canadian Heritage
Diane Lebouthillier	National Revenue
Kent Hehr	Veterans Affairs / Associate Minister of National Defence
Catherine McKenna	Environment and Climate Change
Harjit Singh Sajjan	National Defence
MaryAnn Mihychuk	Employment, Workforce Development and Labour
Amarjeet Sohi	Infrastructure and Communities
Maryam Monsef	Democratic Institutions
Carla Qualtrough	Sport and Persons with Disabilities
Hunter Tootoo	Fisheries and Oceans / Canadian Coast Guard
Kirsty Duncan	Science
Patricia L. Hajdu	Status of Women
Bardish Chagger	Small Business and Tourism

Ministerial responsibility refers to the constitutional doctrine by which cabinet ministers must bear ultimate responsibility for what happens in their ministry.

Collective cabinet responsibility refers to the doctrine by which ministers must publicly support collective cabinet decisions or resign.

In a parliamentary democracy, voters do NOT elect governments.

Instead, voters elect representatives, who then bargain over who should go into government.

In a parliamentary democracy, voters do NOT elect governments.

Instead, voters elect representatives, who then bargain over who should go into government.

So, how do governments form?

Table 12.3 West German Legislative Elections in 1987

Party	Seats	Percentage
Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU)	223	44.9
Social Democrats (SPD)	186	37.4
Free Democrats (FDP)	46	9.3
Greens	42	8.5
Total	497	100

The head of state presides over the government formation process and invests a government with the constitutional authority to take office.

The extent to which the head of state is actively involved in the actual bargaining varies from country to country.

In some countries, the head of state is limited to simply swearing in the government proposed by party elites.

These countries are characterized by ‘free-style’ bargaining.

In some countries, the head of state chooses a particular politician – a formateur – to initiate the government formation process.

A formateur is the person designated to form the government in a parliamentary democracy, and is often the PM designate.

Only Greece and Bulgaria explicitly state how the formateur must be chosen.

In some countries, the head of state is restricted to appointing an informateur.

An informateur examines politically feasible coalitions and nominates a formateur.

These countries are often constitutional monarchies.

Despite the discretion of some heads of state, the *first* formateur is usually the leader of the largest legislative party.

Once the formateur is chosen, she has to put a cabinet together that is acceptable to a legislative majority.

Since it is rare in a parliamentary democracy for a single party to control a legislative majority, the formateur must begin bargaining with other parties.

Once a cabinet has been formed, the support of a legislative majority may or may not have to be demonstrated by a formal investiture vote.

An investiture vote is a formal vote in the legislature to determine whether a proposed government can take office.

If the investiture vote fails, then the government formation process starts again.

If the investiture vote succeeds (or there is no investiture vote), then the head of state appoints the cabinet to office.

The government is then free to rule until (i) it is defeated in a vote of no confidence or (ii) a new election is necessary.

A caretaker government occurs when an election is called or when an incumbent government either resigns or is defeated in a vote of no confidence.

- A caretaker government remains in office until the next government formation process is completed.
- In most countries, there is a strong norm that caretaker governments will not make important policy changes.

Table 12.3 West German Legislative Elections in 1987

Party	Seats	Percentage
Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU)	223	44.9
Social Democrats (SPD)	186	37.4
Free Democrats (FDP)	46	9.3
Greens	42	8.5
Total	497	100

What will the government be?

Table 12.4 Potential West German Governments in 1987

Party	Seats	Percentage	Surplus seats
CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP	497	100	248
CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens	451	90.7	202
CDU/CSU + SPD + FDP	455	91.5	206
CDU/CSU + FDP + Greens	311	62.6	62
SPD + FDP + Greens	274	55.1	25
CDU/CSU + SPD	409	82.2	160
CDU/CSU + FDP	269	54.1	20
CDU/CSU + Greens	265	53.3	16
SPD + FDP	232	46.7	–17
SPD + Greens	228	45.9	–21
FDP + Greens	88	17.7	–161
SPD	186	37.4	–63
CDU/CSU	223	44.9	–26
Greens	42	8.5	–207
FDP	46	9.3	–203

- The leader of the CDU/CSU, Helmut Kohl, was appointed the formateur because he controlled the largest party.

Let's eliminate all potential governments that do not include the CDU/CSU and that do not control a legislative majority.

Table 12.5 Potential Majority West German Governments Containing the CSU/CDU in 1987

Party	Seats	Percentage	Surplus seats
CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP	497	100	248
CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens	451	90.7	202
CDU/CSU + SPD + FDP	455	91.5	206
CDU/CSU + FDP + Greens	311	62.6	62
CDU/CSU + SPD	409	82.2	160
CDU/CSU + FDP	269	54.1	20
CDU/CSU + Greens	265	53.3	16

An office-seeking politician is interested in the intrinsic benefits of office; he wants as much office as possible.

A policy-seeking politician only wants to shape policy.

In an office-seeking world, a formateur can get other parties to join the government only by giving them office.

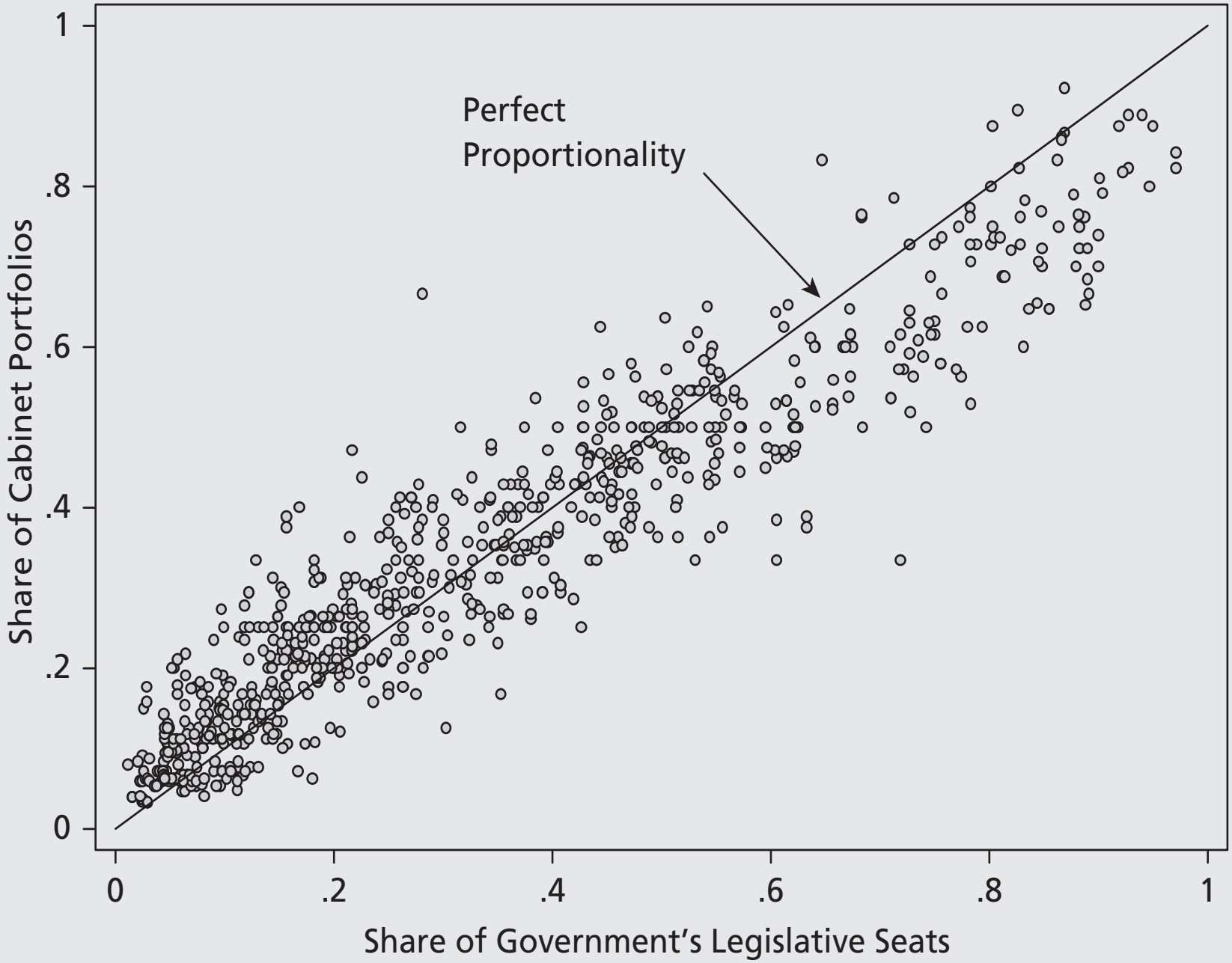
Strong empirical evidence that a formateur has to give large parties more office than small parties.

Gamson's Law states that cabinet portfolios will be distributed among government parties in strict proportion to the number of seats that each party contributes to the government's legislative seat total.

Example

- Party A (80 seats) and Party B (40 seats) form a government (120 seats).
- Party A should receive $\frac{80}{120} = \frac{2}{3}$ of the cabinet portfolios.
- Party B should receive $\frac{40}{120} = \frac{1}{3}$ of the cabinet portfolios.

FIGURE 12.2 **Portfolio Allocation in Western Europe, 1945–2000**



An implication is that you will not want more parties in government than is strictly necessary to obtain a legislative majority.

- A minimal winning coalition (MWC) is one in which there are no parties that are not required to control a legislative majority.

A second implication is that you will choose the smallest minimal winning coalition.

- A least minimal winning coalition is the MWC with the lowest number of surplus seats.

Three minimal winning coalitions:

1. CDU/CSU + SPD (160 surplus seats)
2. CDU/CSU + FDP (20 surplus seats)
3. CDU/CSU + Greens (16 surplus seats)

The least minimal winning coalition:

1. CDU/CSU + SPD (160 surplus seats)
2. CDU/CSU + FDP (20 surplus seats)
3. CDU/CSU + Greens (16 surplus seats)

In a policy-seeking world, a formateur can get other parties to join the government only by giving them policy concessions.

It is likely that a formateur will have to give more policy concessions to large parties than small parties.

An implication is that you will want to form coalitions with parties that are located close to you in the policy space.

- A connected coalition is one in which the member parties are located directly next to each other in the policy space.

A second implication is that you will choose the connected least minimal winning coalition.

FIGURE 12.3 German Party Positions on the Left-Right Economic Dimension, 1987

The least connected minimal winning coalition:

1. CDU/CSU + SPD (160 surplus seats)
2. CDU/CSU + FDP (20 surplus seats)
3. CDU/CSU + Greens (16 surplus seats)

A single-party majority government comprises a single party that controls a majority of the legislative seats.

A minimal winning coalition (MWC) is one in which there are no parties that are not required to control a legislative majority.

A single-party minority government comprises a single party that does not command a majority of the legislative seats.

A minority coalition government comprises multiple governmental parties that do not together command a majority of the legislative seats.

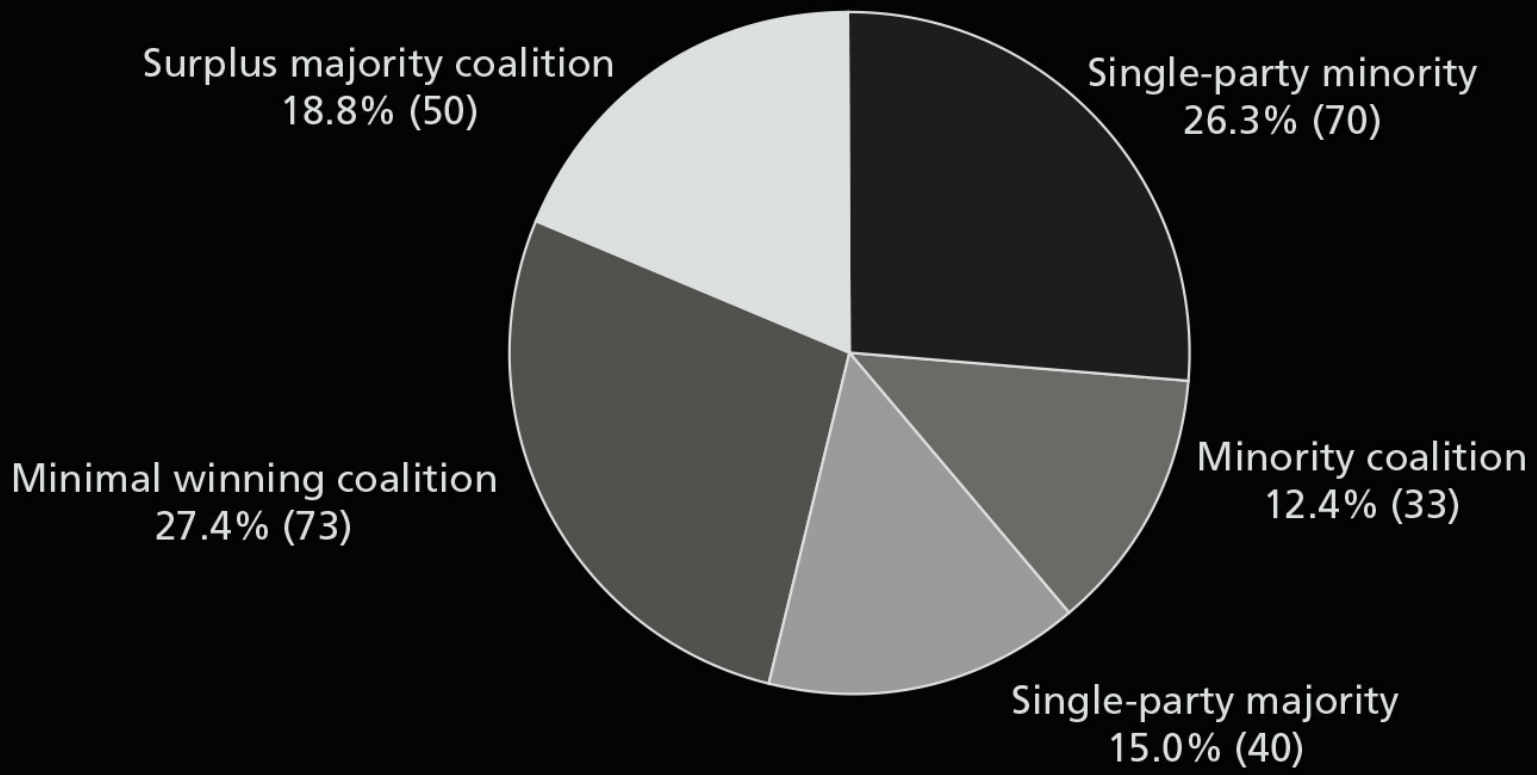
A surplus majority government comprises more parties than are strictly necessary to control a majority of the legislative seats.

Table 12.6 Government Types in Western Europe, 1945–1998

Country	Single party majority	Minimal winning coalition	Single party minority	Minority coalition	Surplus majority	Total
Belgium	3	16	2	1	11	33
Denmark	0	4	14	13	0	31
Germany	1	17	3	0	5	26
Greece	7	1	1	0	1	10
Italy	0	3	14	9	22	48
Luxembourg	0	15	0	0	1	16
Netherlands	0	9	0	3	10	22
Norway	6	3	12	5	0	26
Spain	2	0	6	0	0	8
Sweden	2	5	17	2	0	26
United Kingdom	19	0	1	0	0	20
Total	40	73	70	33	50	266

Figure 12.4 Government Types in Eleven Western European Parliamentary Democracies, 1945–1998

a. Proportion of Governments of Different Cabinet Types, 1945–1998



A minority government must always have an implicity majority in the legislature.

- In some countries, we know who makes up the implicit majority because parties publicly state that they will support the government in any no confidence vote.

- In other countries, the government does not rely on specific 'support' parties, but instead builds legislative majorities on an ad hoc basis.

Minority governments are not anti-democratic.

- They have the support of a legislative majority like all parliamentary governments.

Minority governments occur quite frequently and are not always short-lived.

- Minority governments are quite common in some countries: Denmark (82%), Sweden (81%), Norway (65%).
- Minority governments last about 539 days on average in Western Europe.

Minority governments are more likely in corporatist countries.

- Corporatist interest group relations occur when key social and economic actors, such as labor, business, and agriculture groups, are integrated into the formal policymaking process.

- Pluralist interest group relations occur when interest groups compete in the political marketplace outside of the formal policymaking process.

Minority governments are more likely when opposition influence is strong.

They are less likely when there is a formal investiture vote.

They are more likely when there is a ‘strong’ party.

There are various reasons why a surplus majority government might form.

- They may occur in times of crisis such as after a war.
- They may form because a surplus majority is required to change the constitution.
- There are strategic reasons for forming surplus majority governments.

Table 12.7 Duration of Government Formation Process after Elections, 1945–1998 (Days)

Country	Minimum	Maximum	Average	*N*
Belgium	2	148	59.7	17
Denmark	0	35	9.4	22
Germany	23	73	36.4	14
Greece	3	19	7.5	8
Italy	11	126	47.3	14
Luxembourg	19	52	31.2	12
Netherlands	31	208	85.7	16
Norway	0	16	2.5	14
Spain	2	58	28.6	7
Sweden	0	25	5.7	17
United Kingdom	1	21	8.7	15
All	0	208	29.9	156

FIGURE 12.5 **Average Parliamentary Government Duration by Cabinet Type, 1945–1998 (Days)**

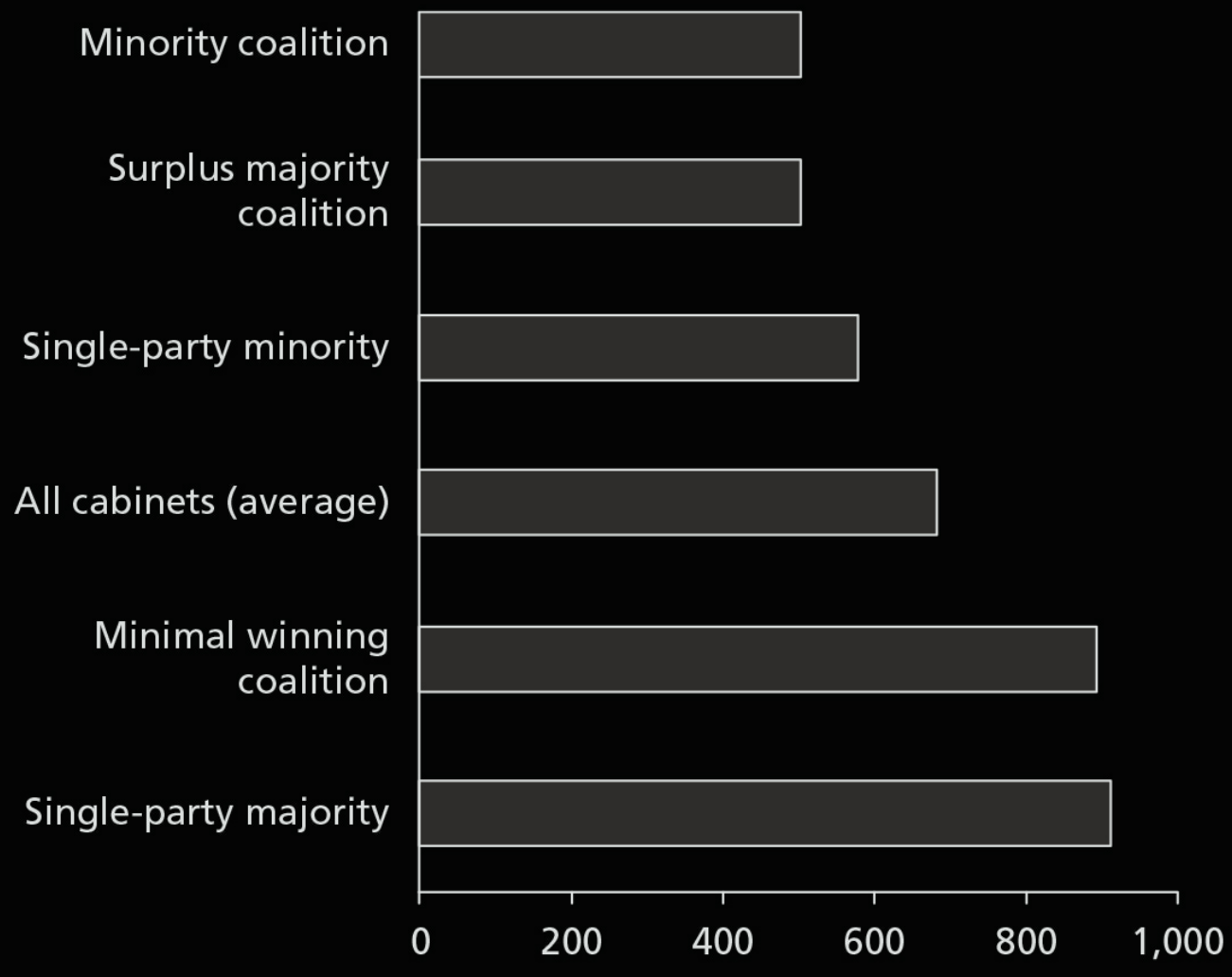
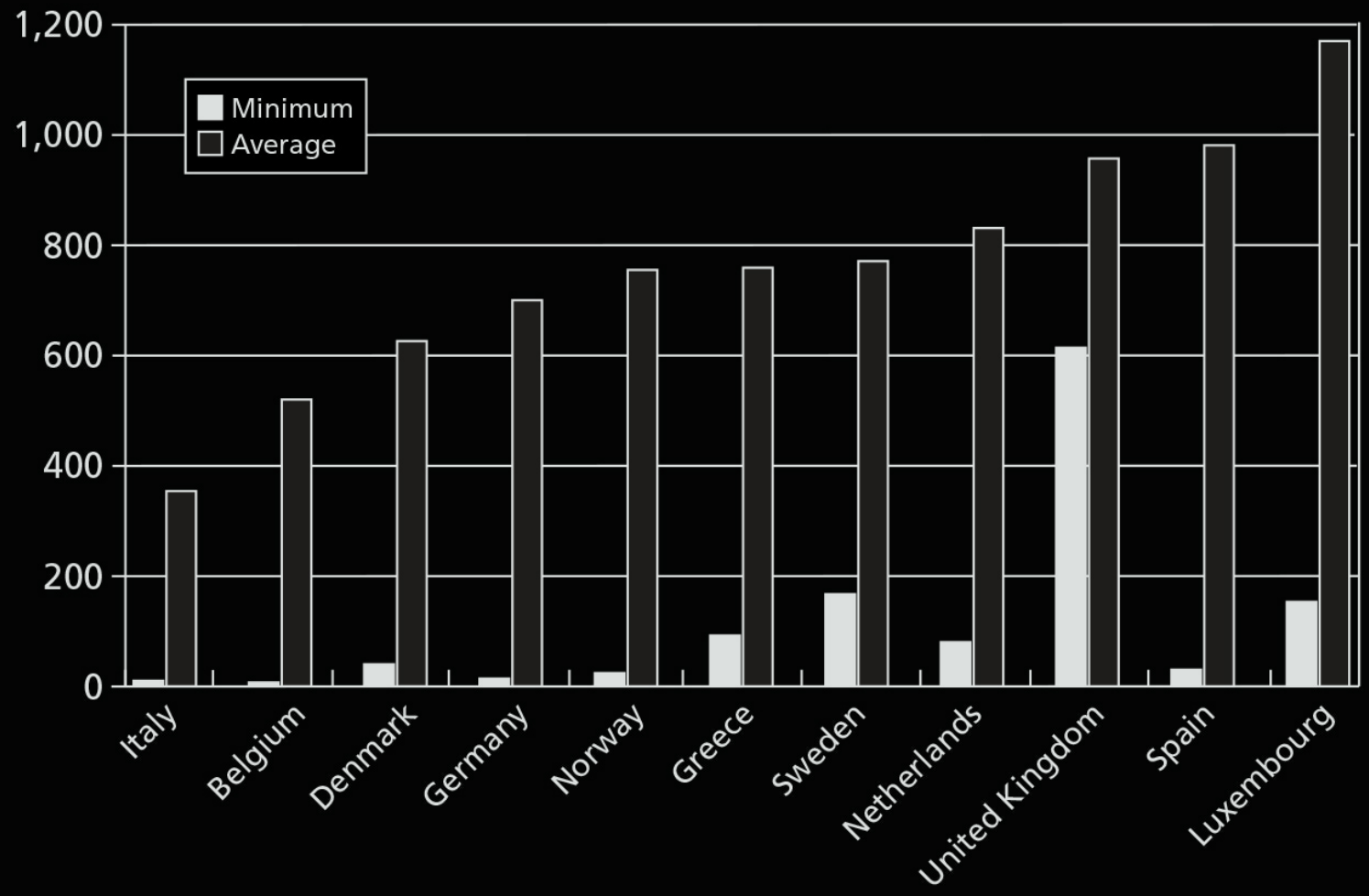


FIGURE 12.6 **Minimum and Average Duration of Governments, 1945–1998 (Days)**



Endogenous election timing

1. Political surfing
2. Political business cycle
3. Signaling

Presidential Democracies

The government in a presidential democracy comprises the president and the cabinet.

The president is the political chief executive and head of state.

The cabinet is composed of ministers whose job it is to be in the cabinet and head the various government departments.

In a presidential democracy, the executive branch and the government are the same thing.

The government formation process is different in presidential democracies.

- The government cannot be dismissed by a legislative majority.
- The president is always the formateur and her party is always in government.
- The reversion point during negotiations is the president's party in power on its own.

A portfolio coalition does not imply a legislative coalition.

Minority governments are more frequent in presidential democracies.

- A minority government that enjoys the implicit support of a legislative majority can exist in both presidential and parliamentary democracies.

- A minority government that does not have the implicit support of a legislative majority can exist only in presidential democracies.

Table 12.8 Government Types in Presidential Systems (Late 1970s–2000)

Country	Single party majority	Majority coalition	Single party minority	Minority coalition	Total
Argentina	1	0	3	2	6
Bolivia	0	4	1	3	8
Brazil	0	11	0	4	15
Chile	0	5	0	0	5
Colombia	0	10	1	0	11
Costa Rica	3	0	3	0	6
Ecuador	0	1	4	15	20
Mexico	2	0	0	0	2
Panama	0	3	0	4	7
Peru	2	4	1	2	9
United States	2	1	2	0	5
Uruguay	0	6	0	0	6
Venezuela	1	1	3	1	6
Total	11	46	18	31	106

In a pure office-seeking world, you would not see coalition governments in presidential democracies.

In a world in which the president cares about policy as well, you might see coalition governments.

The extent to which a president is willing to form a coalition depends on his legislative powers.

Governments in presidential democracies have more nonpartisan ministers.

- A nonpartisan minister is someone who does not come from the legislature.

Presidents allocate cabinet portfolios in a less proportional way than prime ministers.

Table 12.9 Government Composition in Presidential and Parliamentary Democracies

Democratic system	Average percentage of nonpartisan ministers	Average proportionality of cabinet portfolio allocation
Parliamentary	2.12	0.90
Presidential	29.17	0.65

Some presidential cabinets look more like parliamentary ones than others.

Again, this has to do with the legislative powers of the president.

Presidents with relatively weak decree power, whose parties in the legislature are small, and whose parties exhibit low levels of party discipline, are more likely to appoint cabinets that look like those in parliamentary democracies.

Table 12.10 Government Composition in Presidential Systems (Late 1970s–2000)

Country	Average percentage of nonpartisan ministers	Average proportionality of cabinet portfolio allocation[†]
Argentina	7.2	0.89
Bolivia	20.5	0.73
Brazil	46.9	0.50
Chile	6.7	0.85
Colombia	5.6	0.87
Costa Rica	1.8	0.98
Ecuador	65.3	0.27
Mexico	3.6	0.96
Panama	17.8	0.71
Peru	40.8	0.54
Uruguay	1.5	0.77
United States	0	0.91
Venezuela	43.7	0.56
Total	29.2	0.64

Semi-presidential Democracies

There are two types of semi-presidential democracy.

1. In a premier-presidential system, the government is responsible to the legislature but not the president.

2. In a president-parliamentary system, the government is responsible to the legislature and the president.

Table 12.11 Responsibility of Government in Each Type of Democracy

	Parliamentary	Semi-presidential		Presidential
Responsible to:		**Premier-presidential**	**President-parliamentary**	
Legislature	YES	YES	YES	NO
President	NO	NO	YES	YES

The government in a semi-presidential democracy comprises a prime minister and the cabinet.

The prime minister is the political chief executive and the president is the head of state.

In a semi-presidential democracy, the executive branch comprises the president and the government.

In a president-parliamentary democracy, there is no guarantee that the president and the prime minister will come from the same party.

Cohabitation – a president from one political bloc and a prime minister from another – occurs when the party of the president does not control a majority in the legislature and is not represented in the cabinet.

Cohabitation $\neq$ divided government.

Periods of cohabitation can be characterized as an effective system of checks and balances.

However, cohabitation can also be characterized by bitter and violent conflict when the political actors involved share starkly different ideologies and goals.

A Unifying Theoretical Framework

Parliamentary, presidential, and semi-presidential democracies can be viewed as different systems of delegation.

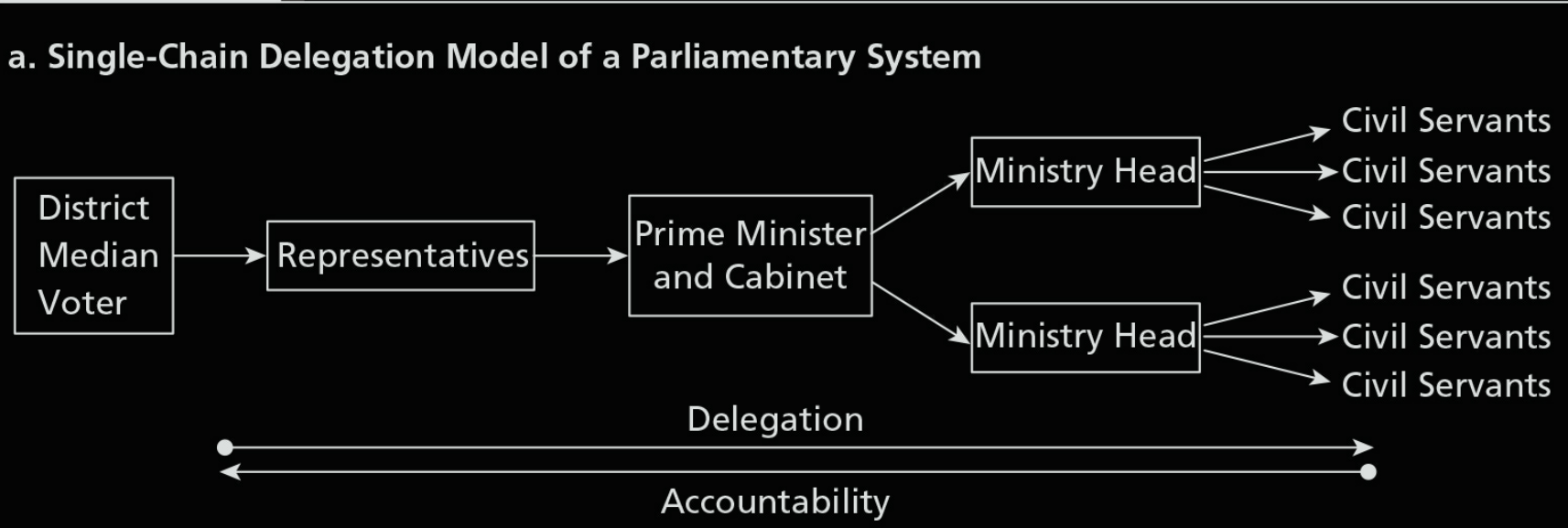
Delegation is an act where one person or group, called the principal, relies on another person or group, called an agent, to act on the principal's behalf.

Shift from direct democracy to representative democracy.

- Direct democracy is a form of government in which people collectively make decisions for themselves.

- Representative democracy is a form of government where citizens delegate power to elected individuals to represent them and act on their behalf.

FIGURE 12.7 Delegation and Accountability in Parliamentary and Presidential Democracies



Delegation has a number of potential advantages for the principal.

- It allows principals to accomplish desired ends with reduced personal cost and effort.
- It allows principals to benefit from the expertise and abilities of others.

But delegation can be perilous since it always involves a transfer of power.

There is always a danger that the agent will "shirk" and not do what the principal wants.

A principal-agent, or delegation, problem refers to the difficulties that arise when a principal delegates authority to an agent who (a) potentially has different goals than the principal and (b) cannot be perfectly monitored.

"In framing a government to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."

We can think of delegation outcomes in terms of (i) agency loss or (ii) whether delegation is successful.

Agency loss is the difference between the actual consequence of delegation and what the consequence would have been had the agent been perfect.

- A perfect agent is one that does what a principal would have done had the principal been the agent.

- Agency loss describes the delegation outcomes from the principal's perspective.

Delegation is considered successful if the delegation outcome improves the principal's welfare relative to what would have happened if the principal had chosen not to delegate.

- The principal's inaction is often called the status quo or reversion point.

- Did delegation make the principal better off compared to the SQ?

Principal-agent game

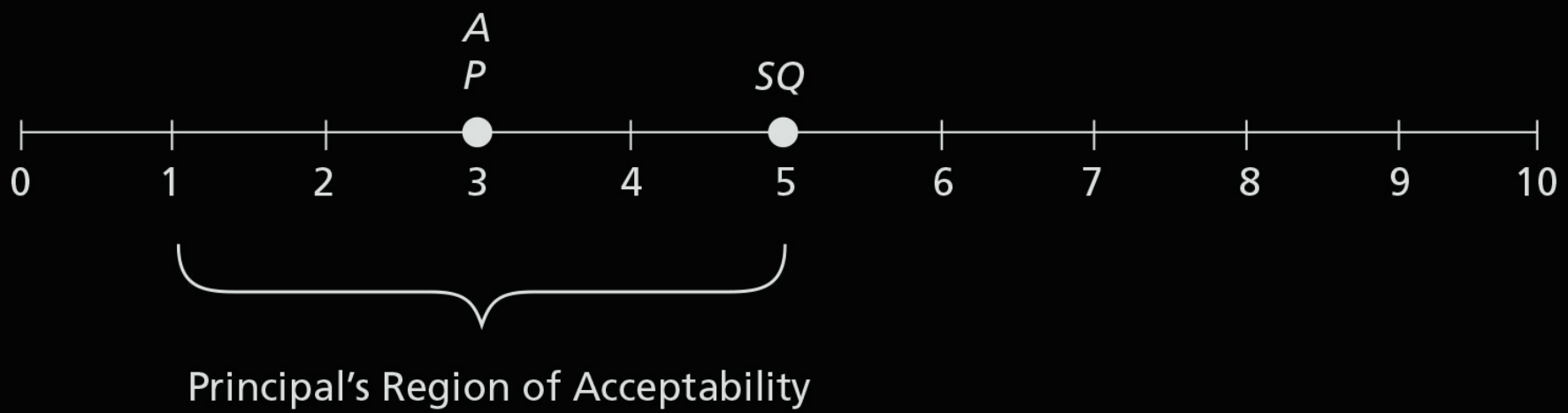
- Two actors: principal and agent.
- Single-peaked preferences on a one-dimensional policy space that runs from 0-10.
- The ideal points for the principal and agent are P and A, respectively.
- The status quo is SQ.

The agent proposes a policy on the 0-10 scale to implement.

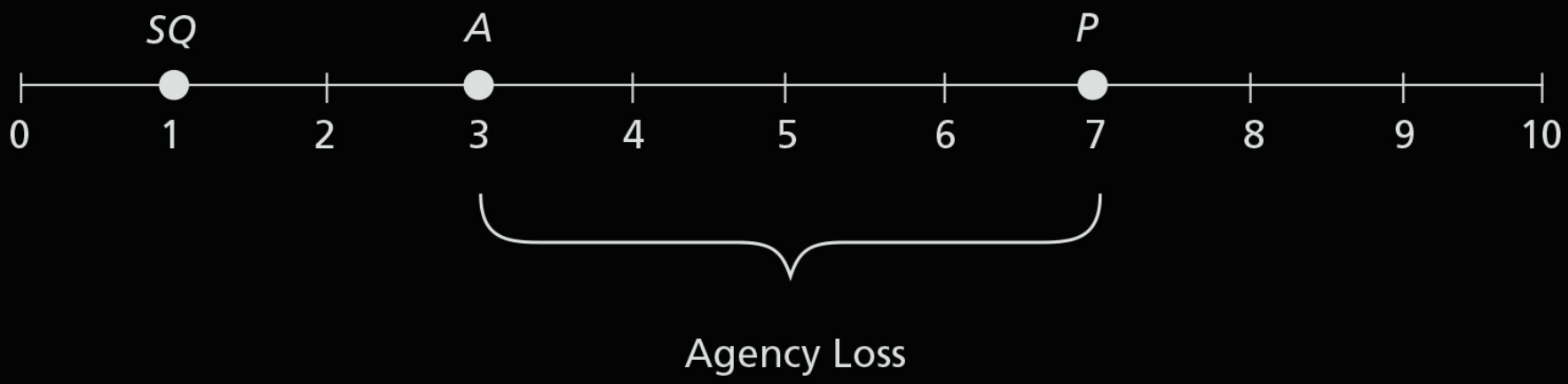
- If the principal accepts the policy, then the new policy is implemented.
- If the principal rejects the policy, then the status quo policy remains in place.

FIGURE 12.8 **Various Principal-Agent Scenarios**

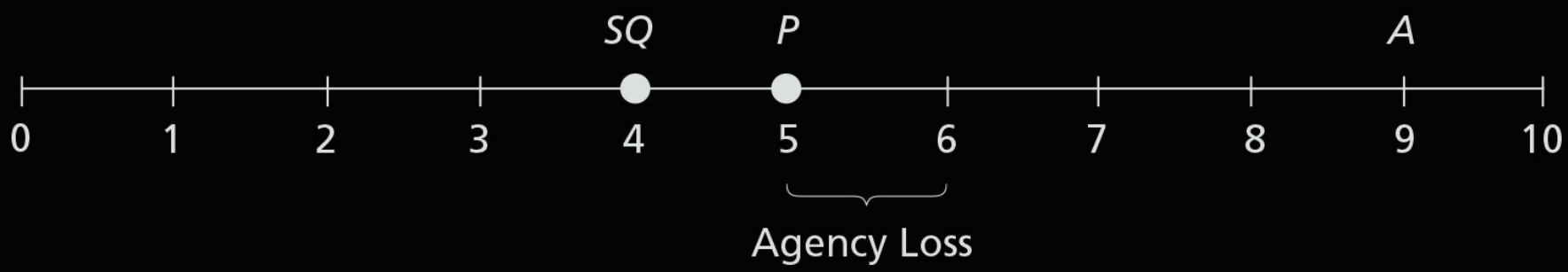
a. The Principal and Agent Share the Same Preferences



b. The Principal and Agent Have Different Preferences I



c. The Principal and Agent Have Different Preferences II



These hypothetical scenarios show that the principal may suffer varying amounts of agency loss when policymaking power is delegated to an agent.

However, they also show that the principal is often better off delegating than maintaining the status quo.

The power of the agent is not unconditional.

Principal-agent problems often arise due to incomplete and asymmetric information.

- Adverse selection occurs when the agent has attributes that are hidden from the principal. 'Types' are unobserved.

- Moral hazard occurs when the agent has the opportunity to take actions that are hidden from the principal. 'Actions' are unobserved.

Principals generally adopt ex ante or ex post mechanisms to gain information about their agents.

1. Ex ante mechanisms.

2. Ex post mechanisms.

Ex ante mechanisms help principals to learn about their agents before these agents are chosen.

- These mechanisms are useful if principal anticipates adverse selection problems.

There are two general categories of ex ante mechanisms

- Screening
- Selection

Ex post mechanisms are used to learn about agents' actions after they have occurred.

- These mechanisms are useful if principal anticipates moral hazard problems.

There are two general categories of ex post mechanisms

- In a fire alarm system, the principal relies on information from others to learn about what the agent is doing.

- In a police patrol system, the principal monitors the actions of his agents himself.

Delegation problems are greater in presidential democracies than in parliamentary ones.

- Presidential democracies have a complex multiple chain delegation process and transactional executive-legislative relations.

- Parliamentary democracies have a simple single chain delegation process and hierarchical executive-legislative relations.