

PRINCIPLES OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS

WILLIAM ROBERTS CLARK • MATT GOLDER • SONIA HADENICHEK GOLDER



Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies

Making and Breaking Governments

The essence of pure parliamentarism is mutual dependence. . . .

The essence of pure presidentialism is mutual independence.

Alfred Stepan and Cindy Skach, "Constitutional Frameworks and Democratic Consolidation"

A cabinet is a combining committee—a *hyphen* which joins, a *buckle* which fastens, the legislative part of the state to the executive part of the state. In its origin it belongs to the one, in its functions it belongs to the other.

Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*

- Political scientists often classify democracies as parliamentary, presidential, or mixed. Whether a democracy is parliamentary, presidential, or mixed depends on the relationship between the government, the legislature, and (if there is one) the president.
- The government formation process in parliamentary democracies can be quite complicated and take a long time. Several different types of government can form: single-party majority governments, minimal winning coalitions, minority governments, surplus majority governments, and so on. The type of government that forms depends on many factors, including whether the political actors in a country are office seeking or policy seeking. Although some governments in parliamentary democracies last several years, others last just a few days.
- The government formation process in presidential democracies is different in many ways from that in parliamentary democracies. Presidential democracies have more minority governments but fewer coalition governments on average than parliamentary ones. They also have more

nonpartisan ministers and a lower proportionality in the allocation of ministerial posts. Governments in presidential democracies look more like those in parliamentary democracies if the president is weak.

- The government formation process in mixed democracies is relatively understudied. There is evidence, however, that governments in mixed democracies share characteristics from governments in both parliamentary and presidential democracies.

In Chapter 5 we looked at how political scientists distinguish between democracies and dictatorships. For example, one set of scholars classifies countries as democratic if (a) the chief executive is elected, (b) the legislature is elected, (c) there is more than one party competing in elections, and (d) there has been an alternation of power under identical electoral rules (Przeworski et al. 2000). Our focus now turns to examining the different types of democracy that exist around the world. As you can imagine, we could distinguish between democracies in many, many different ways. Most political scientists, however, tend to classify democracies according to the form of government they have, that is, according to the rules that define who the government is, how the government comes to power, and how the government remains in power (Cheibub 2007). This classification scheme includes three basic types of democracy: parliamentary, presidential, and mixed.¹ In this chapter, we examine how scholars distinguish between these three types. We then take a close look at how governments form and survive in these democratic systems.

CLASSIFYING PARLIAMENTARY, PRESIDENTIAL, AND MIXED DEMOCRACIES

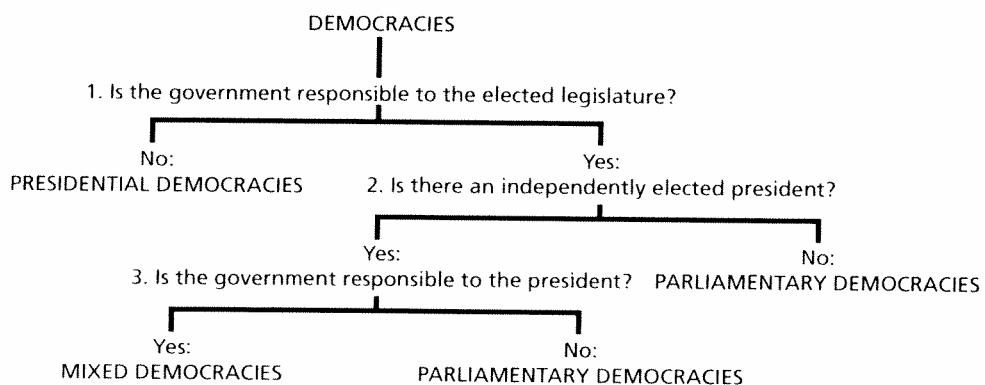
Whether a democracy is parliamentary, presidential, or mixed depends on the relationship between (a) the government, which comprises the political chief executive and the ministers that head the various government departments, (b) the legislature, and (c) the president (if there is one; Cheibub 2007).² Ultimately, distinguishing between the three types of democracy requires identifying which actors can remove the government from office. Democracies in which the legislature cannot remove the government are presidential; democracies in which only the legislature can remove the government are parliamentary; and democracies in which both the legislature and the president can remove the government are mixed. In effect, three basic questions are necessary to be able to unambiguously classify democracies as parliamentary, presidential, or mixed.³ These questions are shown in Figure 11-1.

1. Mixed regimes are sometimes called semi-presidential or premier-presidential (Duverger 1980; Shugart and Carey 1992; Sartori 1997; Elgie 1999).

2. Our upcoming discussion about how to classify parliamentary, presidential, and mixed democracies draws heavily on Cheibub (2007). Interested scholars should also see Cheibub and Gandhi (2004).

3. Some political scientists employ slightly different criteria to those we are about to present for classifying democracies as parliamentary, presidential, or mixed (Verney 1959; Lijphart 1984, 1999; Shugart and Carey 1992; Stepan and Skach 1993; Sartori 1997; Shugart and Mainwaring 1997). These alternative criteria are, however, among other things, operationally ambiguous because they do not allow one to unambiguously code all democracies as either parliamentary, presidential, or mixed (Elgie 1998; Müller, Bergman, and Strøm 2003; Cheibub 2007).

FIGURE 11.1

Classifying Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies

Source: Cheibub 2007, 35

Is the Government Responsible to the Elected Legislature?

The first question is whether the government is responsible to the elected legislature. Recall that the government is made up of the political chief executive and the ministers that head the various government departments. **Legislative responsibility** means that a legislative majority has the constitutional power to remove the government from office without cause.⁴ In those democracies that are characterized by legislative responsibility, the mechanism that the legislature can initiate to remove a government is called the **vote of no confidence**. Basically, a vote of no confidence involves a vote in the legislature on whether the government should remain in office. If a majority of legislators vote against the government, then the government must resign. Some countries, such as Belgium, Germany, Israel, and Spain, adopt a slightly different version of this procedure called a **constructive vote of no confidence**. A constructive vote of no confidence requires that those who oppose the government also indicate who should replace the government if the incumbent loses. In effect, a successful constructive vote of no confidence removes one government from office and replaces it with another in a single step. One of the reasons for adopting a constructive vote of no confidence is that it tends to reduce government instability. As you can imagine, it is often easier to get people to

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; if the government does not obtain a legislative majority in this vote, it must resign. 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; if the government does not obtain a legislative majority in this vote, it must resign.

4. Legislatures may be able to remove members of the government from office in presidential systems, but only "for cause" typically incapacitation or criminal behavior.

vote against a government than it is to get them to agree on who should replace it. During the interwar period in Weimar Germany, it was relatively easy to build legislative majorities who opposed the incumbent government. It was extremely difficult, however, to construct and maintain majorities in favor of a particular alternative. As a result, governments tended to be extremely short-lived. It was in response to this that the postwar German constitution adopted the *constructive* vote of no confidence. With this new provision, an incumbent German government can be brought down only if a legislative majority can also agree on an alternative government to replace it.

In addition to votes of no confidence, some countries have what is known as a **vote of confidence** (Huber 1996). A vote of confidence is similar to a vote of no confidence in that governments who do not obtain a legislative majority must resign.⁵ The difference is that votes of confidence are initiated by governments, whereas votes of no confidence are initiated by the legislature. You might be wondering why a government would ever call a vote of confidence in itself. There are a number of reasons. For example, one has to do with the fact that votes of confidence can be attached to pieces of legislation in many countries. If a government is unsure about its ability to gain sufficient legislative support to pass some piece of legislation, then it can choose to make the vote on this legislation a vote on the continued existence of the government. Oftentimes, legislators who do not like the particular piece of legislation that the government is trying to pass may nonetheless decide to vote for it under these circumstances because they do not actually wish to bring the government down over it. This is particularly the case if bringing the government down means new elections and the possibility of losing their seats. Similarly, governments can employ votes of confidence in an attempt to unite a divided party or to humiliate critics who publicly criticize the government but who are unwilling to actually vote the government out of office. Of course, these tactical uses of the vote of confidence can backfire against those who use them if the government misjudges the willingness of its opponents to call its bluff and vote against the motion.

In sum, legislatures in democracies that exhibit legislative responsibility can remove governments by successfully passing a vote of no confidence or defeating a government-initiated vote of confidence. As Figure 11.1 illustrates, democracies in which there is no legislative responsibility are presidential; democracies that have legislative responsibility may be either parliamentary or mixed. To help determine whether these latter democracies are parliamentary or mixed, we must start by asking a second question.

Is There an Independently (Directly or Indirectly) Elected President?

The second question is whether there is an independently elected president. "Independently elected" refers to the independence of the president from the legislature—the president is

5. Germany represents a slight exception. Article 81 of the German constitution allows a government that has lost a vote of confidence in the lower house (Bundestag) to retain power for six months if it continues to enjoy the support of a majority in the upper house (Bundesrat).

elected to serve a fixed term in office and cannot be removed by the legislature.⁶ Presidents can be either directly elected if the voters cast ballots for the candidate they wish to elect (such as Benin, Mexico, and South Korea) or indirectly elected if voters cast ballots to elect an assembly whose role it is to elect a president (such as the Czech Republic, Italy, and the United States). The mere presence or absence of an independently elected political actor with the title of president, though, is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition in and of itself to classify a democracy as parliamentary, presidential, or mixed. As Figure 11.1 indicates, the defining characteristic of a presidential regime is not that there is an independently elected president; rather, it is that there is no legislative responsibility. In fact, independently elected presidents can exist in all three types of democracy.⁷ For example, directly elected presidents exist in presidential democracies (such as Guatemala, Malawi, and Russia), parliamentary democracies (such as Cape Verde, Ireland, and Slovakia), and mixed democracies (such as France, Mali, and Poland). Similarly, indirectly elected presidents exist in presidential democracies (such as the United States), parliamentary democracies (such as Germany, Greece, and Italy), and mixed democracies (such as Finland prior to 1999).⁸

Although the presence of an independently elected president is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for distinguishing between the three types of democracy, we can conclude that any democracy that has legislative responsibility⁹ but no independently-elected president must be parliamentary. Most parliamentary democracies fall into this category (Cheibub 2007, 37). Still, as we have already indicated, some parliamentary democracies do have independently elected presidents. To distinguish between these parliamentary democracies and mixed democracies, we must ask a third and final question.

Is the Government Responsible to the President?

The third question is whether the government is responsible to an independently elected president. Governments are responsible to a president in a direct way if the president can unilaterally dismiss the government in its entirety or one minister at a time (such as in Iceland and Portugal). They are responsible to the president in an indirect way if the president can dismiss the government by dissolving the legislature (such as in France and Portugal). Democracies in which the government is responsible to both the legislature and an independently elected president are mixed. Democracies in which the government is responsible only to the legislature

6. Some democracies, like the United States, allow for the possibility of removing the president only through the extraordinary and costly procedure of impeachment.

7. It is worth noting that simply bestowing the title of president on a political actor does not necessarily make that actor an independently elected president. For example, Kiribati, the Marshall Islands, and South Africa all have political actors that are called "presidents." The fact that these actors can all be removed from office through a vote of no confidence by the legislature, though, means that they are not *independently* elected. In effect, these actors are the same as prime ministers in parliamentary democracies even though they go by the title of president. It is for this reason, in combination with the existence of legislative responsibility in these countries, that these democracies are considered parliamentary (Cheibub 2007, 39–40).

8. In 2000, Finland adopted a new constitution that removed the president's power to dissolve the legislature and appoint or remove the government. As a result, Finland is today a parliamentary, rather than a mixed, democracy.

(irrespective of whether they have an independently elected president) are parliamentary. In those parliamentary democracies with independently elected presidents, the president may be the “head of state,” but he is not the “head of government.” Instead, the prime minister is the “head of government” and the president’s duties are restricted to the largely ceremonial tasks

of the “head of state.” When the head of state in a parliamentary democracy is not a president, it is typically a monarch—again, with largely ceremonial duties.

As our discussion indicates, we can classify our three types of democracy in the following way:

- **Presidential democracy:** Democracies in which the government does not depend on a legislative majority to exist are presidential.
- **Parliamentary democracy:** Democracies in which the government depends only on a legislative majority to exist are parliamentary.
- **Mixed democracy:** Democracies in which the government depends on a legislative majority and on an independently elected president to exist are mixed.

An Overview of Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies

Figure 11.2 shows the number and percentage of parliamentary, presidential, and mixed democracies that there were in the world each year from 1946 to 2002. As the figure indicates, the parliamentary form of democracy is the most common in the world. Almost half (56 out of 114) of the world’s democracies in 2002 were parliamentary. The percentage of parliamentary democracies in the world has been much higher than this in the past, though, with fully 74 percent of democracies being parliamentary in 1978. About a third (37 out of 114) of the world’s democracies were presidential in 2002 and about a fifth (21 out of 114) were mixed. A striking feature of Figure 11.2 is the rapid increase in the number and percentage of mixed democracies in the world from 1946 to 2002. For example, out of the world’s 31 democracies in 1946, only those of Finland and Iceland (6 percent) were mixed. In contrast, by 2002 fully 21 (18 percent) of the world’s 114 democracies were mixed. In Table 11.1 we list those democracies that were parliamentary, presidential, and mixed in 2002.

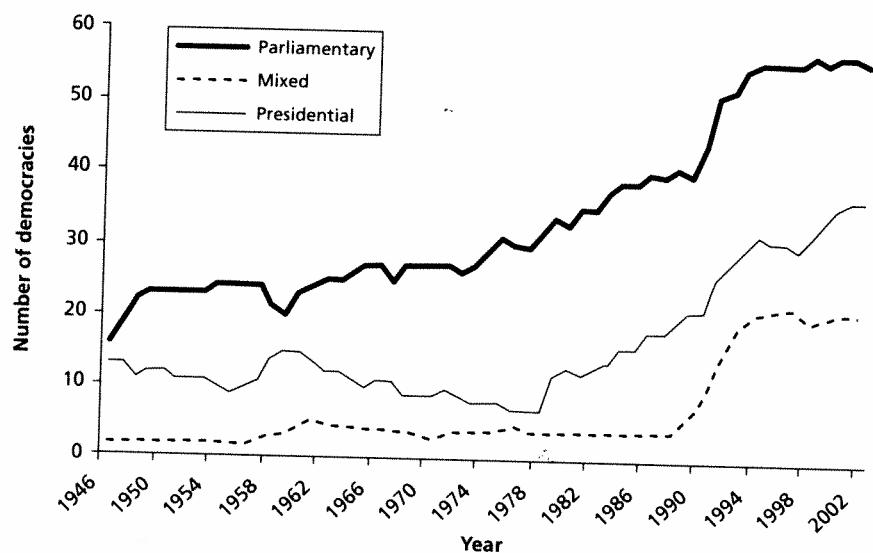
MAKING AND BREAKING GOVERNMENTS: PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACIES

Having addressed the criteria for classifying democracies as parliamentary, presidential, or mixed, we now try to give a more in-depth insight into how these different democratic systems operate in the real world. We do so by carefully examining how governments form and survive. We start with parliamentary democracies.

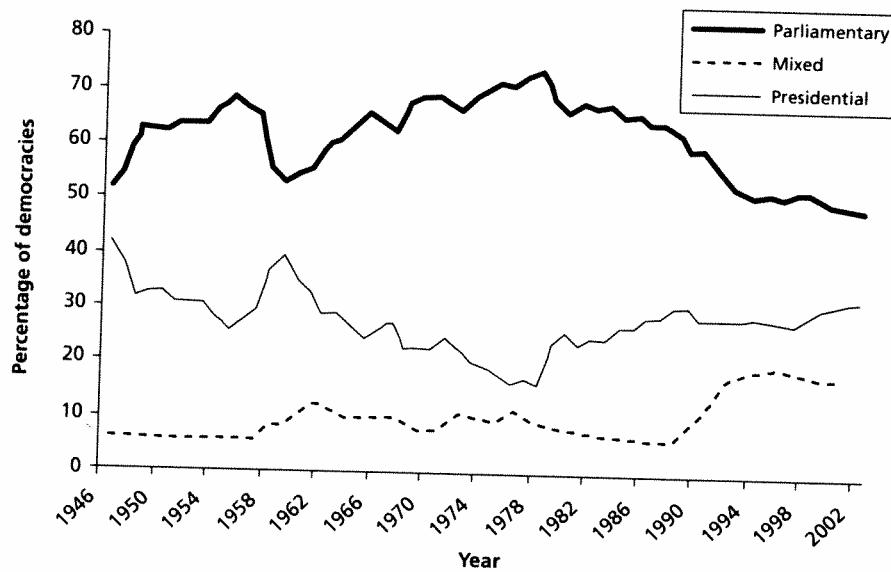
FIGURE 11.2

Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies, 1946–2002

a: Number of Democracies by Democracy Type



b: Percentage of Democracies by Democracy Type



Source: Data were generously provided by José Antonio Cheibub. Przeworski and colleagues' criteria were employed to determine whether a country was a democracy or a dictatorship.

TABLE 11.1

Parliamentary, Presidential, and Mixed Democracies, 2002

Parliamentary	Presidential	Mixed
Albania, Andorra, Antigua, Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Belgium, Belize, Bulgaria, Canada, Cape Verde, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Grenada, Hungary, India, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Kiribati, Latvia, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Malta, Marshall Islands, Mauritius, Nauru, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Papua New Guinea, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent, Sweden, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, Turkey, United Kingdom, Vanuatu	Argentina, Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ivory Coast, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Ghana, Greek Cyprus, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Honduras, Indonesia, Kenya, South Korea, Malawi, Mexico, Micronesia, Namibia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Palau, Panama, Peru, Philippines, San Marino, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Switzerland, United States, Uruguay, Venezuela, Zambia	Armenia, Central African Republic, Croatia, France, Haiti, Iceland, Lithuania, Madagascar, Mali, Moldova, Mongolia, Niger, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Ukraine

The Government

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 in a parliamentary democracy. 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.

Various countries—“prime minister” in the United Kingdom, “chancellor” in Austria and Germany, “taoiseach” in Ireland, “premier” in Italy and Poland, and even “president” in the Marshall Islands and South Africa. Here, and throughout, we will follow convention and refer to the political chief executive in a parliamentary system as prime minister. The **cabinet** is equivalent in many ways to a “country’s board of directors” (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2006, 40). The cabinet comprises ministers whose job it is to be in the cabinet and to head one of the government’s various departments, such as Education, Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Social Policy. The department of which the minister is head is often referred to as the

The **government in a parliamentary democracy** is essentially made up of a prime minister and a cabinet. As an example, the British government is shown in Table 11.2. The **prime minister** (PM) in a parliamentary democracy is the political chief executive and head of the government. The position of prime minister goes under a number of different titles in various

TABLE 11.2

British Government, May 2005

Minister	Department	Minister	Department
Tony Blair	Prime Minister	Jacqui Smith	Chief Whip
John Prescott	Deputy Prime Minister	Alan Johnson	Education
Gordon Brown	Chancellor of the Exchequer	Stephen Timms	Treasury
Margaret Beckett	Foreign Affairs	Hazel Blears	Without Portfolio
John Reid	Home Department	Baroness Amos	House of Lords
David Miliband	Environment	Lord Falconer	Constitution
Douglas Alexander	Transport/Scotland	Hilary Benn	Development
Patricia Hewitt	Health	Des Brown	Defence
Peter Hain	Northern Ireland/Wales	Tessa Jowell	Culture/Sport
John Hutton	Work and Pensions	Ruth Kelly	Local Government
Alistair Darling	Trade & Industry	Jack Straw	House of Commons leader/ Lords Reform
Hilary Armstrong	Social Exclusion/ Duchy of Lancaster		

minister's portfolio. Each minister is directly responsible to the cabinet for what happens in her department. If a problem arises in a particular department, then the minister is supposed to be held responsible for it. This practice is known as the constitutional doctrine of **ministerial responsibility**. Although this practice is part of the constitutional theory of almost all parliamentary democracies, it is now relatively rare to see ministers actually resign when things go wrong under their supervision.

As a member of the cabinet, as well as the head of a government department, a minister is part of a collective entity that is responsible for making the most important decisions about the direction of governmental policy. Cabinet ministers are typically bound by the doctrine of **collective cabinet responsibility**. This doctrine means that, although ministers may air their disagreements about policy freely in cabinet meetings, once a cabinet decision has been made, each minister must defend the government policy in public. Cabinet ministers who feel that they cannot do this must resign, as Robin Cook did as foreign minister in the United Kingdom in 2003 when he disagreed with the British government's decision to go to war over Iraq. This notion of collective cabinet responsibility stands in stark contrast to the behavior and expectations about cabinet ministers in presidential democracies. This is because cabinet members in presidential democracies are in charge of particular policy areas and are not responsible for, or expected to influence, the overall direction of government policy; that is the domain of the president and his staff.

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.

The Government Formation Process

In parliamentary democracies, citizens do not elect the prime minister or cabinet members; they elect only members of the legislature. So, how, you might wonder, do governments actually form and take office? Consider the results from the 1987 West German legislative elections shown in Table 11.3. Can you figure out what German government formed after these elections just by looking at the table? It's not obvious, right?

When thinking about the government formation process, it is important to remember that any proposed government must enjoy the “confidence” of the legislature, both to come to power and to stay in power. As we saw earlier, this is the defining characteristic of a parliamentary democracy—the government must always enjoy the support of a legislative majority. In some countries, a potential government may have to demonstrate that it has such support before it can take office by holding what's known as an **investiture vote** (see Box 11.1). If the proposed government does not win a majority in this vote, it cannot take office. Even if there is no formal investiture vote, though, a potential government in a parliamentary democracy must still have the *implicit* support of a legislative majority at all times. This is because of the ability of the legislature to call a vote of no confidence in the government at any time. If the government ever loses such a vote because it cannot garner the support of a legislative majority, then it must resign. Ultimately, a parliamentary government can be removed from office any time a majority of legislators decides that this is what should happen. As a result, governments that come to power in parliamentary systems must always enjoy the implicit support of a legislative majority even if they never have to explicitly demonstrate this in an investiture vote or a vote of no confidence.

If a single party controlled a majority of the seats in the legislature, then one might expect

that party to form a **single-party majority government**. In fact, this expectation is strongly supported by data from the Constitutional

A single-party majority government is a government in which a single party controls a legislative majority.

Change and Parliamentary Democracy (CCPD) Project. These data show that a party controlling a majority (50 percent plus 1 or more) of legislative seats nearly always forms a gov-

TABLE 11.3 German Legislative Elections, 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
Other parties	0	0.0
Total	497	100

Source: Data are from Adam Carr at <http://psephos.adam-carr.net>.

INVESTITURE VOTES

An **investiture vote** is a formal vote in the legislature to determine whether a proposed government can take office. The precise rules governing investiture votes vary from country

to country (Bergman 1993). Some constitutions require an absolute majority—more than half of all legislative members must vote for the proposed government. Other constitutions require only a plurality—more people should vote for the proposed government than vote against it. In Germany and Spain, a proposed government must win an absolute majority in a first vote of investiture but only a plurality if a second vote is needed. In Belgium, Ireland, and Italy, a new government requires only a plurality in the first vote. If abstentions are allowed, they may count for or against the government, depending on the country. For example, abstentions count in favor of the government in Italy. As Strøm (1995, 75) reports, "Giulio Andreotti's famous [1976] government of *non sfiducia* ('non-no confidence') was supported by no more than 258 deputies out of 630. Yet Andreotti comfortably gained office, since all but 44 of the remaining members abstained."

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

ernment on its own. For example, a single party controlling a majority of seats formed a government on its own fifty (85 percent) out of a possible fifty-nine times that such a party existed in thirteen West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998.⁹

But what happens when no single party commands a legislative majority, as in Germany in 1987? This is, in fact, the normal situation in most parliamentary democracies. As the CCPD data reveal, fully 251 of the 310 governments (81 percent) that formed in the thirteen West European parliamentary democracies in their sample emerged from political situations in which no single party controlled a majority of legislative seats. As we shall see in more detail when we examine electoral rules in the next two chapters, the frequent use of proportional representation electoral systems helps to explain why so few parties ever win a majority of votes or seats. Only countries like the United Kingdom that employ disproportional electoral rules, such as single-member district plurality systems, regularly produce single parties that control a legislative majority. Even in these countries, it is rare for a single party to actually win a majority of the votes; instead, the mechanical effect of the disproportional electoral rules awards legislative majorities to parties with less than 50 percent of the vote.

9. The countries included here are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. The Comparative Parliamentary Democracy Project can be found at <http://www.pol.umu.se/ccpd/CCPD/index.asp> (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003). Data are from the March 2006 release.

We know that any potential government must implicitly control a legislative majority before coming to office. There are no rules about who should be in this legislative majority. As a result, any legislator could conceivably be a part of the government's majority support and, hence, play a role in appointing the government. In practice, though, the tight discipline of political parties in many countries means that the actual business of forming a government tends to be done by a small group of senior politicians in each party (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2006, 49). These politicians typically include party leaders and potential cabinet members. After an election or the fall of a previous government, these party leaders bargain with one another and a government forms as soon as enough party leaders have committed their support (and that of their party) for it to command a legislative majority. But can we say anything more about the government formation process and the type of government that these actors are likely to choose?

Table 11.4 illustrates all of the potential governments that could have formed in West Germany in 1987. It also indicates the number of surplus seats controlled by each potential government that were not required for obtaining a legislative majority. For example, a coalition between the SPD, FDP, and the Greens would have twenty-five "surplus" seats more than they actually needed to guarantee a legislative majority. In contrast, a coalition between just

TABLE 11.4 Potential West German Governments, 1987

Party	Seats	Percentage	Surplus seats
CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP	497	100.0	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

Note: The numbers in the "Surplus seats" column are the number of seats controlled by each potential government that were not required for obtaining a legislative majority.

the SPD and Greens would be twenty-one seats shy of a majority. One question you should ask yourself is whether all of these potential governments are equally plausible. To answer this question, you really need to know more about the exact process by which governments form in parliamentary democracies.

A graphical depiction of the government formation process in parliamentary regimes is shown in Figure 11.3. The head of state, typically a monarch or president, presides over the government formation process and it is he who ultimately invests a government with the constitutional authority to take office.¹⁰ The extent to which the head of state actively becomes 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 the party elites. If there is an investiture vote, then the proposed government must demonstrate that it has a legislative majority. Once this is done, the head of state simply appoints the government. This government stays in power until the next election, until it loses in a vote of no confidence, or until it resigns. In other countries, the head of state plays a more active role by choosing a particular politician to initiate the government formation process. This politician is known as a **formateur**. It is her job to construct a government.

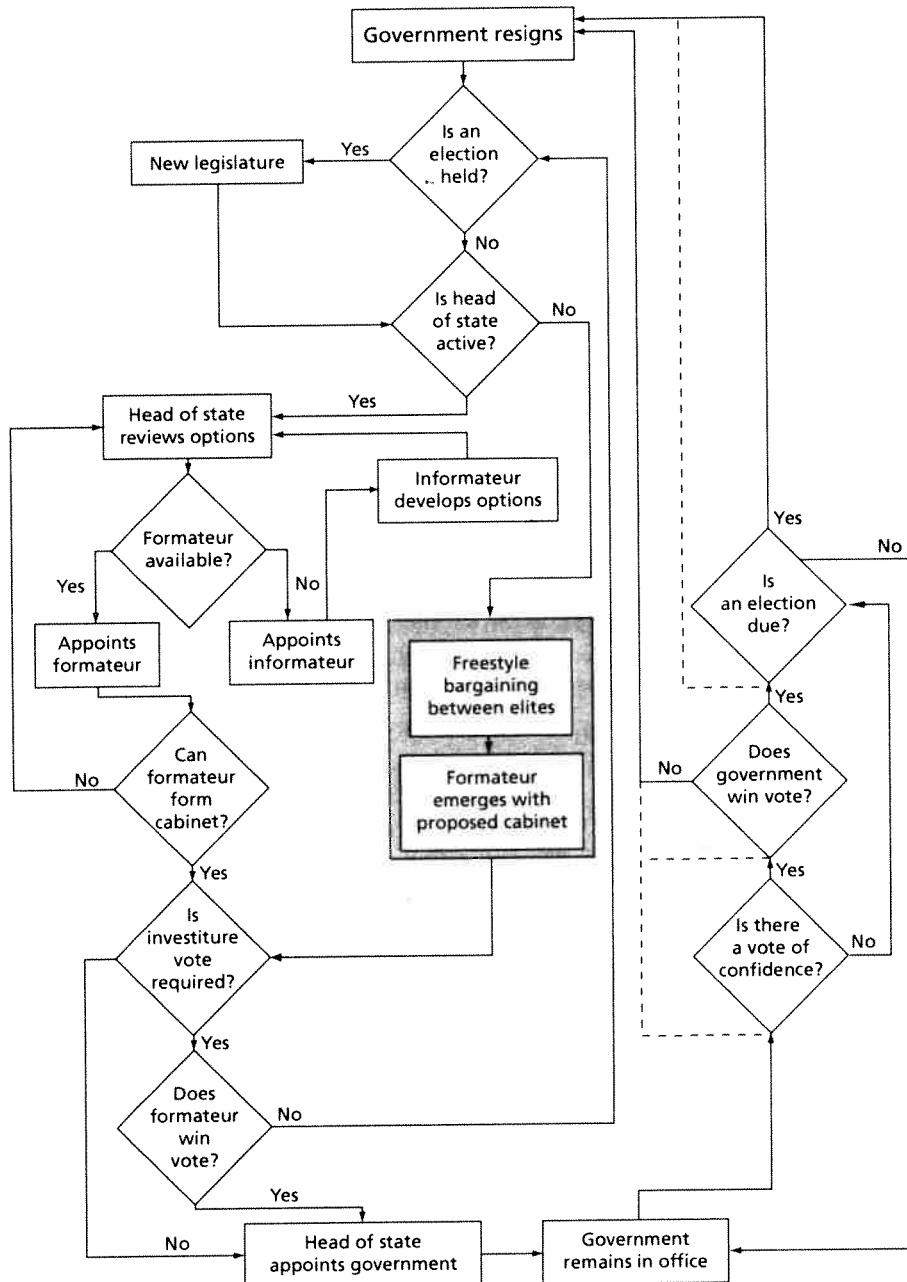
A **formateur** is the person designated to form the government in a parliamentary regime. The formateur is often the PM designate.

In some countries, the constitution explicitly states who the formateur will be. For example, the Greek constitution states that the head of state must appoint the leader of the largest party as the formateur. If this person fails to form a government, then the head of state allows the leader of the second largest party to try to build a government by making him the new formateur. This process continues until a formateur successfully forms a government. Obviously, the head of state has little discretion in these countries because the election results determine the order in which parties get to try to form the government.

In other countries, the formateur is determined by tradition. For instance, there is an implicit convention in the United Kingdom that the outgoing prime minister gets the first chance to form the government. Only if the old prime minister cannot form a government does one of his rivals get the chance. Thus, even if the outgoing prime minister loses support in the polls, he still gets to be the first formateur. Of course, if the outgoing prime minister loses significant electoral support, he will be unable to form a government and, thus, his right to get first crack at forming a government is little more than a formality; in practice, a beaten prime minister usually admits defeat on election night. There have been a few notable exceptions to this, though. For example, the outgoing prime minister Edward Heath remained in office for a few days after losing the February 1974 legislative elections in the United Kingdom before conceding that he could not form a government. Again, the head of state enjoys little discretion in appointing the formateur in countries like the United Kingdom.

10. Our description of the government formation process in parliamentary democracies builds on Gallagher, Laver and Mair (2006, 47–54).

FIGURE 11.3 | **Government Formation Process in Parliamentary Democracies**



Source: Laver and Schofield (1998, 63).

In contrast to these countries, there are others in which the head of state is less constrained and can actually “choose” the formateur in a more meaningful sense. For example, choosing the formateur has been one of the more important duties belonging to the head of state in countries like Iceland and the Czech Republic. The Icelandic president’s prerogative of choosing the formateur was critical in the formation of a coalition between the Social Democratic Party and the Independence Party, which governed from 1959 to 1971. The president’s ability to choose the formateur also played a crucial role in the formation of subsequent nonpartisan governments in Iceland (Kristinsson 1999, 93–94). Following legislative elections in June 2006, the Czech president, Vaclav Klaus, was able to influence the government formation process in a starkly partisan way because of his power to appoint the formateur. The Czech elections resulted in a dead heat in the 200-seat legislature: a coalition of left-wing parties won 100 seats, and a coalition of right-wing parties won 100 seats. The Czech president, who belonged to a right-wing party called the Civic Democratic Party (ODS), appointed a member of his own party—Mirek Topolanek—to be the first formateur. When his nominated formateur failed to get his proposed government passed in an investiture vote that saw all 100 legislators from the right vote for it and all 100 legislators from the left vote against it, the Czech president simply renominated the same person to be the next formateur. In somewhat dubious circumstances, Topolanek managed to win a second investiture vote even though he proposed the same government as before—he won the vote 100 to 98 when two left-wing legislators surprisingly decided to abstain rather than vote against the proposed government.

In other countries, the ability of the head of state to engage in partisan politics is seen as inappropriate. As a result, such countries have limited the power of the head of state to appointing an **informateur**. An **informateur** is someone who is supposed to lack personal political ambition and whose job it is to look at politically feasible coalitions and recommend people who would make good formateurs. In the Netherlands, the monarch chooses an **informateur**, who then chooses a formateur. The existence of an **informateur** means that the head of state is, at least theoretically, one step removed from the partisan nature of the government formation process.

An **informateur** examines politically feasible coalitions and nominates the formateur.

Despite the discretion enjoyed by some heads of state, it turns out that the formateur is nearly always the leader of the largest party in the legislature. In most cases, the formateur is also the prime minister designate. All of this is to be expected, given that the leader of the largest party can often credibly threaten to veto any proposal by other possible formateurs. Once the formateur has been chosen, she has to put a cabinet together that is acceptable to a legislative majority.

The ability to nominate cabinet members is one of the most important powers held by the prime minister (formateur). In single-party majority cabinets, the prime minister has enormous discretion in regard to whom to appoint to the cabinet and is constrained only by the internal politics of her party. Politicians might be rewarded with cabinet appointments because they have demonstrated loyalty to the party or the prime minister, because they represent a particular ideological faction within a party, or because they have useful

administrative skills. In some cases, a PM might feel that internal party politics require her to appoint internal party opponents to the cabinet. In fact, the British PM Margaret Thatcher, later to be called the “iron lady,” felt compelled to appoint a cabinet in which her own party supporters were in a distinct minority on first being elected in 1979 (Young 1990, 138). Still, even at this initial moment of relative weakness, Thatcher (1993, 26) later recalled, “I made sure that the key economic ministers would be true believers in our economic strategy.”

In coalition cabinets, the discretion that the PM has in nominating cabinet members is obviously more constrained. Typically, party leaders in the proposed cabinet will nominate particular ministers to the subset of portfolios that have been allocated to their party during the initial stages of the government formation process. Although possible, it is rare to see the PM or party leaders veto a nomination by another party leader. On the face of it, this would seem to suggest that the leaders of each government party are generally free to pick the people they want for “their” portfolios. The fact that we do not see nominations vetoed, though, does not necessarily mean that party leaders have full discretion in whom they nominate. It might simply be the case that objectionable ministerial choices are not proposed in the first place (Indriðason and Kam 2005). Given the considerable influence that cabinet members have over policy in their respective portfolios, party leaders will bargain hard, first over how many ministers they get, and second over who should be appointed to these posts, before deciding whether to support the proposed cabinet.

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. If the investiture vote is unsuccessful, then the government formation process starts all over again; there may or may not be a new election before this happens. If the investiture vote is successful (or there is no required vote), however, then the head of state simply appoints the cabinet nominated by the formateur to office. At this point, the government is free to rule until it is defeated in a vote of no confidence or until a new election is necessary. If the government is defeated in a vote of no confidence or a new election is called, then the incumbent government remains in office to

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. It rules the country for an interim period until a new government is formed.

run the country as a **caretaker government**.¹¹ This caretaker government remains in office until the next round of the government formation process is complete and a new government is ready to take its place. In most countries,

there is a strong constitutional convention that caretaker governments will not make any important policy changes to those in place when the outgoing government loses its parliamentary basis (Herman and Pope 1973; Golder 2007). Ireland represents somewhat of an exception to this in that Irish caretaker governments can, and do, use the full range of powers available to any “normal” government (Laver and Shepsle 1994, 292). As you can

11. In Germany, the “constructive” vote of no confidence means that an alternative government must be proposed as part of a no confidence motion. As a result, there is no caretaker government in Germany if the legislature ever passes such a motion, because there is no interim period between governments.

11.2

PRINCIPAL-AGENT, OR DELEGATION, PROBLEMS

Forming a coalition cabinet raises an interesting problem. Each party in government (principal) delegates the discretion and resources to make policy in a particular ministry to a cabinet minister (agent). In a single-party government, the cabinet ministers all come from the same party. As a result, we expect that each cabinet minister is likely to implement his party's preferred policy. In coalition governments, though, the leaders of each government party delegate power to make policy to cabinet ministers from *different* parties. It is often the case that party leaders will agree to a coalition policy that is some mix of each party's preferred policy during the government formation process. But what's to stop cabinet ministers from implementing their own party's preferred policy in the ministries that they control rather than the policy that they had

agreed to before coming to power? This is known generally as a **principal-agent, or delegation, problem**. The problem is that the cabinet minister has more information about the available policy options in her ministry than the

rest of the cabinet and can take advantage of this informational asymmetry if she wants.

Müller and Strøm (2000) suggest that problems of delegation that arise in the context of coalition governments can be resolved simply by writing very detailed coalition agreements in an attempt to bind the relevant parties to an agreed government policy. In effect, parties promise, in writing, to implement the coalition policy. But what makes these promises credible? Why would parties keep these promises just because they have written them down in detail? Political parties have recognized that there is a delegation problem when forming a cabinet and have come up with a couple of institutional solutions to help monitor and keep tabs on what their coalition partners are doing.

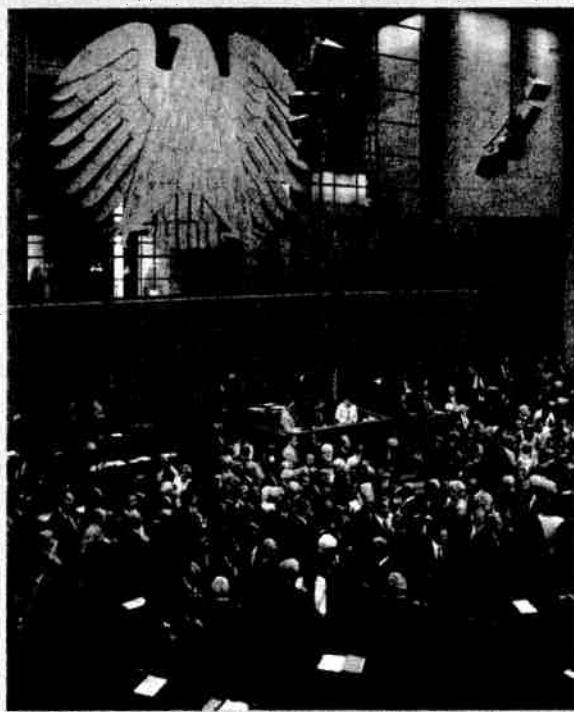
One solution is to use what are known as "junior ministers." These individuals are also sometimes known as ministers of state or undersecretaries. Although it is rare for government parties to veto cabinet nominations by another party, Michael Thies (2001) has argued that they often appoint their own junior ministers to cabinet portfolios controlled by their coalition partners in order to ensure that their coalition partners do not stray too far from the agreed government policy. The appointment of junior ministers is part and parcel of the deal that sets up the cabinet, but these junior ministers are not actually full members of the cabinet—they generally do not share power with ministers, they do not vote in cabinet, and they only occasionally participate in cabinet meetings. Nonetheless, the cabinet minister to whom they have been appointed cannot unilaterally dismiss them. Thies finds that parties purposely assign their own junior ministers to ministries headed by their partners in Italy, Japan, and the Netherlands but not in Germany.

A second solution that helps to resolve Thies's "German anomaly" focuses on legislative committees. Martin and Vanberg (2004) show that the legislative committees in the Dutch and German parliaments scrutinize government bills more extensively when the ideological divergence between coalition partners on the issues addressed in the bill is large. Kim and Loewenberg (2005) examine the importance of legislative committees further and show that

government parties in the German Bundestag from 1961 to 1998 have appointed members of their own party to chair legislative committees that oversee ministries controlled by their coalition partners. In effect, German parties use legislative committees, and not junior ministers, to monitor the actions of their coalition partners.

The appointment of junior ministers and legislative committee chairs are both mechanisms that can be used to help cope with the delegation problems that arise in the relationship between government parties, as principals, and members of the cabinet, as their agents. Why some countries choose to use both mechanisms, whereas others prefer to employ one rather than the other, is an open question that requires more research.

As you can imagine, the types of principal-agent, or delegation, problems that we have mentioned in the context of forming coalition governments are ubiquitous in political (and other) settings. For example, think about elections and the government formation process in parliamentary democracies more broadly for a moment. At election time, voters (principals) are delegating policymaking power to legislators (agents). Following elections, these legislators (principals) then delegate policymaking power to the prime minister and her cabinet (agents). When the cabinet is being constructed, each party in government (principals) delegates policymaking power in a particular ministry to a cabinet minister (agent), who may or may not be from the same party. This process of delegation continues, with cabinet ministers (principals) delegating policymaking and policy-implementing power to civil servants or bureaucrats (agents) within their gov-



Lawmakers in the German parliament in Berlin cast their ballots for a confidence vote on July 1, 2005. German chancellor Gerhard Schroeder called the confidence vote, which he intentionally lost, in order to enable early elections to be held that fall.

ernment departments. In effect, parliamentary democracy is, by its very nature, a long chain of delegation and accountability, from the voters to the ultimate policymakers in the cabinet (and civil service), in which, at each link, a principal (in whom authority is placed) delegates to an agent, whom the principal has conditionally authorized to act on her behalf (Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003). This chain of delegation is indirect in that voters (the original principal) get to directly elect only the legislators; all other agents are only indirectly elected and indirectly accountable to the voters.

Some form of delegation is required in any large political system. After all, citizens simply do not have the time or expertise to make all the necessary policy decisions in a country. Still,

although delegation allows principals to benefit from the expertise and abilities of others, it can also be perilous. This is because delegation involves a transfer of power, and there is always a danger that the people to whom power is transferred will abuse that power and not do as the principal wants (Lupia 2003, 34). One of the Founding Fathers in the United States, James Madison, famously recognized this problem in the *Federalist*, number 51, when he noted, "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."

imagine, the fact that caretaker governments generally have no authority to take major policy initiatives can be problematic if the government formation process takes a long time. This is particularly the case if the government has collapsed as the result of some sort of political, economic, or military crisis. We will return to the issue of how long it takes to form a government a little later in the chapter.

A Simple Model of Government Formation

Now that we know more details about the government formation process in parliamentary democracies, we can return to our West German example from 1987. Remember that all of the potential governments are listed in Table 11.4. Given what you now know about the government formation process, ask yourself whether all of these governments are equally plausible. Who is likely to be the formateur? The leader of the CDU/CSU was appointed formateur because he controlled the largest party in the Bundestag at the time. As the leader of the largest party, Helmut Kohl (CDU/CSU) was given the first chance to form the government. If you were Helmut Kohl, would you form a government that did not include your own party? The obvious answer is no. As a result, you can immediately eliminate those potential governments in Table 11.4 that do not include the CDU/CSU.

Are any of the remaining potential governments more plausible than others? The fact that a government must control a legislative majority in order to come to power suggests that the government formation process may be easier if the proposed government actually controls a majority of legislative seats. As a result, you might think to eliminate those potential governments that do not have a positive number of surplus seats, that is, those governments that do not control a legislative majority.¹² Table 11.5 lists the remaining potential governments in boldface type. Which of the seven remaining possibilities do you think is most likely to become the government? To answer this question, you should start to think about the goals of the political actors engaged in the government formation process. What do they want?

12. As we'll see a little later, governments that do not explicitly control a legislative majority do sometimes come to power. You should start to think about how and why this might happen.

TABLE 11.5

Remaining Potential West German Governments, 1987

Party	Seats	Percentage	Surplus seats
CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP	497	100.0	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

Note: Entries that are not shown in boldface type either do not contain the CDU/CSU or do not control a majority of legislative seats.

11.3

Political scientists often divide politicians into those who are office seeking and those who are policy seeking. When forming a government, an office-seeking politician will want to secure as many ministerial portfolios as he can. After the position of prime minister, cabinet positions represent the highest political posts in a parliamentary regime. In effect, landing a cabinet portfolio is often a signal of a successful political career and is a prize that many politicians seek.

Being in the cabinet brings power and fame. An **office-seeking politician** is interested in the “intrinsic” benefits of office. In contrast, a **policy-seeking politician** will, when

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.

forming a government, want to secure ministerial portfolios in order to be able to influence public policy. This type of politician is not interested in the “intrinsic” benefits of office; he does not want to be a minister simply for the sake of being a minister. Instead, a policy-seeking politician wants ministerial portfolios so that he can make a difference in how the country is run.

A Purely Office-Seeking World

Imagine again that you are Helmut Kohl, the CDU/CSU leader, in Germany in 1987. If you lived in a purely office-seeking world, what government would you propose? In order to control a legislative majority, you know that you must get the support of other party leaders because your party controls only a minority of legislative seats. Because you live in a purely office-seeking world, you can win their support only by giving them office. In effect, you say to them, "I will give you X ministerial posts in the government in exchange for your legislative support." You will obviously want to give them as few portfolios as possible, however, so that you can keep the rest for yourself. In order to win their support you will probably have to give up more cabinet positions to a party leader who controls a large number of legislative seats than to a party leader who controls a small number of seats. In fact, there is quite strong empirical evidence that a prime minister must give portfolios to other parties in proportion to the number of seats that each party contributes to the government's legislative majority. This apparent empirical regularity is known as **Gamson's Law** (see Box 11.3).

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 majority.

11.3

PORTFOLIO ALLOCATION AND GAMSON'S LAW

Gamson's Law: 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 majority (Gamson 1961).

The allocation of cabinet seats in the Netherlands following the 1998 legislative elections is shown in Table 11.6. On the whole, the last two columns indicate that the distribution of cabinet portfolios is quite proportional to the relative size of each party in the government. Often, there is some evidence that the degree of proportionality declines as the parties become smaller. One reason for this is the "lumpy" nature of cabinet positions. Once a party is invited and agrees to join the government, it must get at least one cabinet seat irrespective of the number of legislative seats that it contributes to the government's majority—it cannot receive half a cabinet portfolio or a third of one. The lumpy nature of cabinet portfolios means that small parties tend to be slightly overrepresented and large parties slightly underrepresented in the portfolio allocation process. There is some evidence for this in the 1998 Dutch government.

Several recent studies have questioned the extent to which Gamson's Law holds in practice. For example, Druckman and Warwick (2001) point out that some ministerial portfolios are more important or more powerful than others. As a result, a party may agree to receive fewer cabinet positions than its size would indicate under Gamson's Law in exchange for more powerful portfolios. The 1998 Dutch government provides some evidence for this. Both the PvdA and the VVD received a smaller percentage of cabinet portfolios than they could have

TABLE 11.6

Allocation of Cabinet Seats in the Netherlands, 1998

Party	No. of legislative seats	No. of cabinet ministers	Proportion of government seats	Proportion of cabinet ministers
Social Democrats (PvdA)	45	6	46.4	42.9
Liberal Democrats (D66)	14	3	14.4	21.4
Liberals (VVD)	38	5	39.2	35.7

Note: 150 seats in legislature.

expected given their size. These parties did, however, get the more important portfolios, such as the prime minister and interior minister (PvdA) or the foreign minister, finance minister, and defense minister (VVD). Although the D66 appears to be overcompensated, one of its three cabinet appointments is a "minister without portfolio," that is, a minister who has no specific responsibility. For further studies examining the applicability of Gamson's Law, see Frechette, Kagel, and Morelli (2005); Druckman and Warwick (2006); Carroll and Cox (2007); and Laver, de Marchi, and Mutlu (2007).

One of the implications of the office-seeking logic that we have just outlined is that you will not want more parties in government than are strictly necessary for you to obtain a legislative majority. Thus, you will want to form a particular type of coalition government

A **minimal winning coalition** (MWC) is one in which there are no parties that are not required to control a legislative majority. A **least minimal winning coalition** is the MWC with the lowest number of surplus seats.

called a **minimal winning coalition** (MWC). A minimal winning coalition is one in which there are just enough parties (and no more) to control a legislative majority. Of the seven remaining potential governments in Table 11.5,

there are three MWCs: (CDU/CSU + SPD), (CDU/CSU + FDP), and (CDU/CSU + Greens). In none of these coalitions is it possible to remove a party without, at the same time, giving up your legislative majority. A second implication of the purely office-seeking logic is that you will choose the smallest MWC, or the **least minimal winning coalition**. The least MWC is the one with the lowest number of surplus seats. You want the least MWC because you do not want to "buy" more legislative seats with office than you strictly have to. This leads to the hypothesis that if the world is purely office seeking, then we should observe least minimal winning coalitions. In terms of our example of the 1987 German election, this means that we should expect the leader of the CDU/CSU to form a minimal winning coalition with the Greens because this MWC has the fewest surplus seats.

A Purely Policy-Seeking World

Imagine that you are Helmut Kohl again but that you now live in a purely policy-seeking world. Which of the remaining potential governments in Table 11.5 would you propose? To answer that question, you will need to know something about the policy positions of the parties along the salient issue dimensions in Germany in 1987. Figure 11.4 illustrates the policy positions or “ideal points” of the four German parties with legislative seats on the left-right dimension of economic policy. As the leader of the CDU/CSU, you know that you must get the support of other party leaders in order to control a legislative majority. Because you now live in a purely policy-seeking world, you can win their support only by giving them policy concessions. This means that instead of being able to implement policy at your own ideal point, you will have to implement a coalition policy that lies somewhere between the ideal points of all your coalition partners. It is likely that you will have to make more policy concessions to win the support of a party leader who controls a large number of legislative seats than you will to win the support of a party leader who controls a small number of legislative seats. In other words, large parties will tend to be able to pull policy more toward their ideal point than small parties.

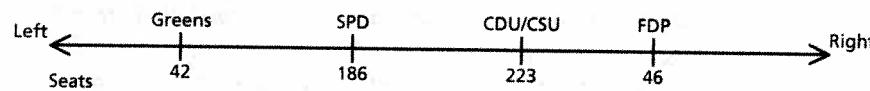
One of the implications of this logic is that you will want to form governments with parties that are located close to you in the policy space. Political scientists often refer to this type of coalition as a “compact coalition,” or **connected coalition**. A connected coalition is one in which all members of the coalition are

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

located next to each other in the policy space. For example, a coalition between the CDU/CSU and the FDP is a connected coalition. A coalition between the CDU/CSU and the Greens, however, is not a connected coalition because there is a noncoalition party (the SPD) that lies between them in the policy space. Of the seven remaining potential governments in Table 11.5, there are five connected coalitions: (CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP), (CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens), (CDU/CSU + SPD + FDP), (CDU/CSU + SPD), and (CDU/CSU + FDP). The parties in all of these coalitions are located directly next to each other in the policy space. A second implication of the purely policy-seeking logic is that you will choose the connected least minimal winning coalition. You want the connected least MWC because you do not want to “buy” more legislative seats with policy than you strictly have to. This leads to the hypothesis that if the world is purely policy seeking, then we should observe connected least minimal winning coalitions. In terms of our German example, this means that we should expect the leader of the CDU/CSU to form a coalition government with the FDP.

FIGURE 11.4

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



The Trade-off between Office and Policy

The actual government formed by Helmut Kohl in 1987 was a coalition between the CDU/CSU and the FDP. This was the prediction from the purely policy-seeking logic. Does this mean that policy seeking dominates office seeking in Germany? There is a vast literature in political science that seeks to answer questions like this, but we believe that this sort of question is hard, if not impossible, to answer empirically. Consider our example again. It is difficult to know if policy seeking really dominated office seeking in Germany, because the CDU/CSU did not have to give up too much extra office in order to get a coalition policy closer to its ideal point. In effect, the CDU/CSU preferred to give up slightly more office by forming a government coalition with the FDP (four extra surplus seats) in exchange for a coalition policy that was likely to be much closer to its ideal point than if it had formed a coalition with the Greens. In practice, we believe that politicians probably care about both office and policy and are, therefore, always making trade-offs. They are always asking how much extra office they should give up to get policy closer to their ideal point or how much policy they should give up to get more office. If this is the case, then it probably makes little sense to categorize real-world politicians into purely policy-seeking or purely office-seeking types.

Even if politicians were purely office seekers or purely policy seekers, we believe that the reality of political competition would force them to act *as if they cared about both policy and office*. For example, a politician who wishes to affect policy must win office in order to be in a position to change policy. As a result, a purely policy-seeking politician will have to care about office, if only as a means to affect policy. Similarly, an office-seeking politician will realize that voters are unlikely to elect or reelection him if he cares only about office and being famous. A consequence is that an office-seeking politician will have to care about policy, if only to make sure that he wins election. Ultimately, we see no way to distinguish between office-seeking and policy-seeking politicians simply by observing the world, because all politicians will act as if they care about both office and policy. If we are right, then it probably makes slightly more sense to think that government coalitions are likely to be connected least MWCs rather than just least MWCs.

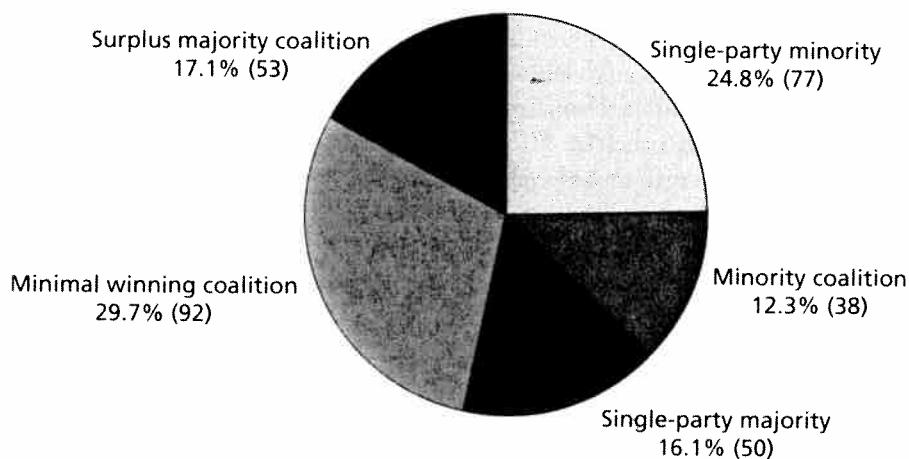
Different Types of Government

We know that a government must control an implicit legislative majority in order to come to power and remain in office in a parliamentary democracy. Up to this point, we have assumed that governments must contain enough parties that they *explicitly* control a majority of legislative seats. In fact, the logic presented in the previous section suggests that governments should contain just enough parties to obtain this legislative majority and no more. It is for this reason that we have focused up to this point on single-party majority governments and various forms of minimal winning coalitions. When we look around the world, however, we sometimes observe other types of parliamentary government—minority governments and surplus majority governments. Table 11.7 provides information on 310 cabinets by country that formed in thirteen West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998. Figure 11.5 illustrates the percentage of cabinets of each government type and the percentage of time spent under each government type.

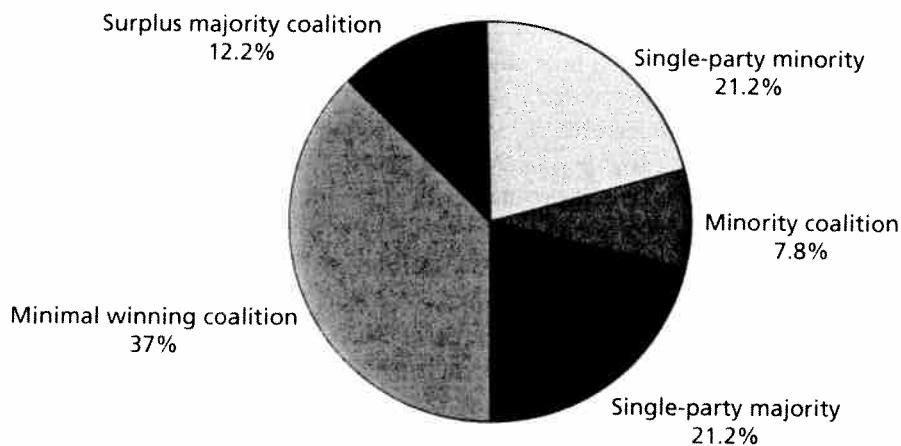
FIGURE 11.5

Government Types in Thirteen West European Parliamentary Democracies, 1945–1998

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



b: Proportion of Time under Different Cabinet Types, 1945–1998



Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: Data do not include caretaker or nonpartisan governments. The numbers in parentheses indicate the number of governments of different cabinet types.

TABLE 11.7

Government Types in Thirteen West European Parliamentary Democracies, 1945–1998

Country	Single-party majority	Minimal winning coalition	Single-party minority	Minority coalition	Surplus majority	Total
Austria	4	14	1	0	3	22
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
Ireland	6	5	6	5	0	22
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	50	92	77	38	53	310

Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: Data do not include caretaker or nonpartisan governments.

Minority Governments

A **minority government** is one in which the governmental parties do not together command a majority of legislative seats.

Minority governments may be single-party minority governments or minority coalition governments. You are probably wondering how a minority government could come to power and why it would stay in power in a parliamentary democracy. After all, the opposition in parliament controls enough seats that it could remove the government through a vote of no confidence whenever it agrees to do so. A minority government can exist only as long as the opposition chooses not to bring it down. This means that whenever we observe a minority government, we know that there must be an implicit majority in the legislature that supports it. Every day that a government is not defeated in a vote of no confidence, it implicitly enjoys the support of a legislative majority.

In some countries, we know precisely who makes up this implicit majority because some nongovernmental party or parties publicly state that they will sustain the government against votes to overthrow it but do not want to be in the cabinet (Powell 2000, 102). In exchange, the

A **minority government** is one in which the party or parties in power do not explicitly command a majority of legislative seats. Minority governments may be single-party minority governments or minority coalition governments. You are probably wondering how a minority government could come to power and why it would stay in power in a parliamentary democracy. After all, the opposition in parliament controls enough seats that it could remove the government through a vote of no confidence whenever it agrees to do so. A minority government can exist only as long as the opposition chooses not to bring it down. This means that whenever we observe a minority government, we know that there must be an implicit majority in the legislature that supports it. Every day that a government is not defeated in a vote of no confidence, it implicitly enjoys the support of a legislative majority.

government usually agrees to consult these “support parties” on various policy matters. This occurred in Britain in 1977 when the Liberals agreed to support the Labour Party when it lost its majority. This also occurred more recently after the 2005 legislative elections in New Zealand when two minor parties—the Progressive Party and United Future—publicly agreed to support a minority coalition government made up of the Labour Party and New Zealand First. In other countries, the government does not rely on specific support parties but builds legislative majorities on an ad hoc basis. In effect, the government builds different majorities for each piece of legislation that it wants to pass. For example, the minority Socialist government in France in 1988 formed legislative majorities with the Communists on their left to pass some policies and with the UDF on their right to pass other policies (Powell 2000, 105). In these countries, it is not always easy to figure out exactly who in the legislature is keeping the minority government in power; all we know is that at least one of the nongovernmental parties must be helping it at any given point in time. One consequence of this is that it becomes difficult for voters to know who is responsible for policy and to hold them accountable for it.

For a long time, minority governments were seen as undemocratic and an unfortunate anomaly. They were seen as something that should occur only infrequently and something that, if they did occur, should be short-lived. Strøm (1984, 1990) was one of the first political scientists to challenge this accepted wisdom. He argued that minority governments should be seen as a normal and “democratic” outcome of party competition in parliamentary regimes. One thing that he illustrated was the frequency with which minority governments formed in West European democracies and the relative stability that characterized these cabinets. As Figure 11.5a indicates, over a third (37.1 percent) of all governments that formed in West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998 were minority governments. In countries like Denmark (82 percent), Sweden (81 percent), and Norway (65 percent), minority governments were the norm in this period. In addition to their numerical frequency, minority governments have also been in power for long stretches of time. For example, minority cabinets have ruled in West European parliamentary democracies for well over a quarter (29 percent) of the postwar period (Figure 11.5b). Each minority government that formed remained in power for well over a year (513 days) on average.

Several theories have been proposed to explain the apparent puzzle of why minority governments exist. All of these theories point to the importance of policy in the government formation process. If politicians cared only about office, then it is hard to understand why any nongovernmental party would ever choose not to be in the cabinet when it has the power to force its way into it. In other words, why would nongovernmental parties ever allow a minority government to enjoy all the benefits of office without controlling a legislative majority? The simple answer is that they wouldn’t. If politicians care about policy, however, then we can think of situations in which a party might decide that it can better achieve its policy objectives by remaining outside the cabinet.

Strøm (1984, 1990) claims that minority governments are more likely in countries in which nongovernmental (opposition) parties have a strong say over policy. The strength of

the opposition typically depends on the structure of the legislative committee system in each country. All legislatures have committee systems to help them carry out their work. In some countries, the opposition has little influence over policy because the committee system largely accepts whatever the government proposes. The opposition is in a much stronger position in those countries in which the committee system is specifically designed to facilitate the dispersal of policymaking influence to many groups, including nongovernmental parties. The extent to which policy is made in parliamentary committees and the degree to which opposition parties can exert influence in these committees obviously varies from country to country.¹³ Strøm hypothesizes that the more powerful a country's committee system and the greater the influence of the opposition in it, the lower the incentive for opposition parties to enter government, because they can shape policy without actually being in the cabinet. As a result, we should expect to see more minority governments in these countries. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Opposition strength hypothesis: Minority governments will be more likely when opposition influence is strong.

Of course, you might be wondering why a party would ever choose to influence policy from outside the government rather than from inside it. Although all countries typically allow some degree of opposition influence over policy, this influence is never stronger than that of the government itself. So, why not influence policy from within the cabinet? In fact, why not enjoy the benefits of office while shaping policy? There are several reasons, most having to do with future electoral prospects, why a party might choose not to be in the cabinet despite the loss of office benefits and the decreased ability to shape policy. First, parties may be reluctant to take responsibility for the policy that will be implemented. Governing parties are much more likely to be held responsible for failed policies than opposition parties. Indeed, there is strong evidence that incumbent parties tend to lose votes in subsequent elections. In a study of twenty democracies over twenty-five years, Powell (2000, 47–48) finds that incumbent governments lose about 2 percent of their vote on average. By remaining in the opposition, parties can often achieve some of their policy objectives while being held less accountable if things go wrong. Second, a party may have made a preelection pledge not to go into government with certain parties. Breaking this promise might be electoral suicide at the next election. Third, opposition parties have much more flexibility in choosing their campaign strategies in future elections because they do not have a past record in office to constrain them. These are all possible reasons why parties might choose not to be in government in countries that allow them to influence policy from the opposition benches.

Luebbert (1984) provides a related, but slightly different, explanation for the existence of minority governments. Like Strøm, he claims that minority governments are more likely in

13. The committees in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden are very influential in the policymaking process. Moreover, committee chairs are allocated in strict proportion to the size of each party in the legislature (subject to some minimal size requirement) irrespective of whether these parties are in the government or in opposition. In contrast, the legislative committees in France, Greece, Ireland, and the United Kingdom are quite weak and opposition parties are almost never allowed to chair them (Powell 2000; Döring 1995).

countries in which nongovernmental parties have a strong say over policy. Rather than focusing on a country's legislative committee system, though, Luebbert argues that the ability of opposition groups to influence policy depends heavily on whether a country has **corporatist or pluralist interest group relations**. A pluralist country is one in which interest groups compete in the political marketplace outside of the formal policymaking process. In contrast, a corporatist country is one in which key social and economic actors have a formal institutional role in making policy. In these countries, interest groups are organized into national, specialized, hierarchical, and monopolistic peak organizations that sit down with each other and the government to hammer out public policy. As Luebbert (1984, 235) notes, corporatism "allows, indeed guarantees, access to policymaking by a variety of groups." For example, ministries in Norway and Sweden that contemplate legislative or administrative action that might affect a particular interest group are obliged to consult that interest group before proceeding. In Austria the formal representation of labor, business, and agricultural interests is guaranteed by the existence of "chambers," which have a formal right to be consulted on a wide range of policy matters and to which all working citizens are obliged by law to belong. Thus, the cabinet is only one of the sites in which fundamental social and economic decisions are made in corporatist countries. Interest groups, and political parties that represent these groups, have a range of alternatives for the expression of their concerns beyond the cabinet. As a result, we should expect to see more minority governments in corporatist countries because of the lower incentive for opposition parties to enter government. This leads to the following hypothesis:

Corporatist hypothesis: Minority governments will be more likely in corporatist countries.

Strøm has also argued that minority governments are less likely in countries that require a formal investiture vote because potential minority governments face a higher hurdle to taking office than in countries in which no investiture vote is required. If a formal investiture vote is required, then opposition parties must choose to openly support a minority government. Some parties who would not necessarily support a particular minority government in a public vote, however, may find it acceptable to tacitly lend their support to a government if no investiture vote is required. Bergman (1993) distinguishes between "positive" and "negative" government formation rules. He notes that when rules are positive (investiture votes are required), then the onus is on the government to demonstrate that it is supported by a legislative majority. In contrast, when rules are negative (no investiture votes are required), the onus is on the parliament to show that the government is not tolerated. This distinction between being *supported* and *tolerated* suggests that investiture votes might pose particular difficulties for minority governments.

Investiture hypothesis: Minority governments will be less likely when there is a formal investiture vote.

Corporatist interest group relations occur when key social and economic actors, such as labor, business, and agriculture groups, are integrated into the formal policy-making process.
Pluralist interest group relations occur when interest groups compete in the political marketplace outside of the formal policy-making process.

Another explanation for the existence of minority governments focuses on policy divisions within the opposition. In effect, a minority government can survive and be relatively stable if opposition parties cannot reach an agreement on whom to replace it with. For example, the Congress Party was able to dominate Indian politics as a minority government for many years because the opposition parties on each side of it could not agree on a suitable replacement.¹⁴ A similar situation occurred with the Social Democrats in Sweden and the Christian Democrats in Italy. These parties were consistently able to form minority governments by being relatively large parties located in the middle of the ideological spectrum with opposition parties on either side. These parties, often referred to as “strong” parties, could credibly demand to govern alone because their ideological opponents could not agree on an alternative government to replace them with. This has led Laver and Shepsle (1996) to hypothesize that minority governments should be more likely when there is a strong party.

Strong party hypothesis: Minority governments are more likely when there is a “strong” party.

As good political scientists, you should be wondering if these hypotheses are supported by the empirical evidence. In Table 11.8, we present the results from a statistical analysis in which we examine the effect of opposition strength, corporatism, investiture votes, and strong parties on the probability that a government will be a minority (single party or coalition) government. Our sample includes all governments that formed in thirteen West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998. We omit nonpartisan governments and those that formed in the presence of a majority party (Strøm 1990, 75). Majority situations are excluded because minority governments are not a feasible option, and nonpartisan governments are omitted because they cannot be assigned a majority or minority status by their very nature. If the theories that we have presented are correct, then we should observe that higher levels of opposition strength, corporatism, and the existence of strong parties make minority governments more likely and that investiture vote requirements make them less likely.

Opposition strength ranges from 1 (low) to 9 (high) and comes from a survey of country experts who were asked to rate their country in regard to the potential impact the opposition has on policy (Laver and Hunt 1992). *Corporatism* ranges from 0 (low) to 5 (high) and captures both the proportion of unionized workers in the workforce and the overall number of unions—a country is more corporatist when it has only a few unions but a high proportion of unionized workers (Garrett 1998). *Investiture* captures whether there is a formal investiture vote or not. *Strong party* indicates whether a “merely strong” or a “very strong” party exists.¹⁵ According to theory, the existence of a strong party should make the formation of a minority government more likely. This is particularly the case if the party is “very strong” rather than just “merely strong” (Laver and Shepsle 1996). Our upcoming results do not depend on whether we treat these two types of strong party separately or together as we do here.

14. It was only when the opposition parties decided to fight the Congress Party on an anticorruption platform rather than an ideological platform that they were able to unite to defeat it (Andersen 1990, 528–530).

15. This measure comes from Martin and Stevenson (2001). It was originally created by Paul Warwick using Laver and Shepsle’s WINSET program.

TABLE 11.8

Testing Theories of Minority Governments

Dependent Variable: Did a Minority Government Form? 1 = Yes, 0 = No					
Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Opposition strength</i>	0.31*** (0.05)				0.39*** (0.11)
<i>Corporatism</i>		0.57** (0.22)			0.60* (0.31)
<i>Investiture vote</i>			-0.54*** (0.16)		-0.84** (0.34)
<i>Strong party</i>				-0.52** (0.21)	-0.08 (0.33)
Constant	-1.63*** (0.28)	-2.06*** (0.79)	0.20 (0.12)	0.29* (0.17)	-3.86*** (1.42)
<i>N</i>	251	106	251	155	85
Log likelihood	-152.46	-69.53	-167.55	-104.28	-39.66

Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: Cells show coefficients from a probit model with robust standard errors in parentheses.

* = greater than 90% significant.

** = greater than 95% significant.

*** = greater than 99% significant.

So what do the results in Table 11.8 reveal? Remember that next to each variable is a “coefficient,” and beneath this is a “standard error.” The coefficient indicates the direction in which the variable affects the probability of forming a minority government. Thus, a positive coefficient indicates that an increase in the variable makes it more likely that a minority government will form and a negative coefficient indicates that an increase in the variable makes it less likely. The standard error beneath the coefficient essentially tells us how confident we are in our results; we tend to be more confident the smaller the standard error relative to the coefficient. To help indicate how confident we are in our results, we use stars, next to the coefficient. In Table 11.8, one star indicates that we are over 90 percent confident in our results; two stars that we are over 95 percent confident; and three stars that we are over 99 percent confident in our results. A coefficient with no stars indicates that we cannot be very confident that this variable has any effect on the probability that a minority government will form.

As you can see, there is very strong evidence to support the claims made by Luebbert and Strøm that countries with high levels of corporatism and opposition strength are more likely to have minority governments. This is because the coefficients associated with *Opposition strength* and *Corporatism* are always positive and significant. To see the substantive effect of these variables, imagine a country with no strong parties, no investiture votes, and a mean level of corporatism (3.5). If we increased the strength of opposition parties in this country from 2.2 (Greece) to 5.2 (Sweden), then the results from Model 5 indicate that we would

increase the probability of a minority government by 438 percent.¹⁶ Now imagine a country with no strong parties, no investiture votes, and a mean level of opposition strength (4.9). If we increased the degree of corporatism in this country from 1.7 (United Kingdom in 1990) to 3.0 (Italy in 1990), then the results from Model 5 indicate that we would increase the probability of a minority government by 446 percent. There is also very strong evidence to support Strøm's conjecture that countries with formal investiture votes are much less likely to have minority governments. This is because the coefficient associated with *Investiture* is always negative and significant. If a country without a strong party and with mean levels of opposition strength and corporatism decided to adopt formal investiture requirements, then the results from Model 5 indicate that it could expect to cut the probability of minority governments in half (53 percent). These are all very large substantive effects.

In stark contrast to these results, there is no compelling evidence for Laver and Shepsle's (1996) claim that the existence of strong parties makes minority governments more likely. In fact, the coefficient on *Strong party* is always negative. This is the exact opposite of what their theory predicts and suggests that, if anything, the presence of strong parties reduces the likelihood of minority governments. These results are consistent with the findings of a more detailed and complicated analysis conducted by Golder (2006). Thus, although it seems entirely plausible that the existence of parties located in the middle of the ideological spectrum with opposition parties on either side might increase the likelihood of minority governments, there is no systematic evidence, as yet, to support this hypothesis.¹⁷ In sum, we have presented evidence that minority governments are more likely in countries where (a) opposition parties are able to strongly influence policy, (b) interest group relations are organized along corporatist lines, and (c) there are no formal investiture vote requirements.

Surplus Majority Governments

Although governments that appear "too small" (minority) often form, cabinets that appear

A surplus majority government is one in which the cabinet includes more parties than are strictly necessary to control a majority of legislative seats.

"too large" (surplus majority or oversized) also emerge from time to time. A **surplus majority government** is one in which the cabinet contains more parties than are strictly necessary to

control a legislative majority. In effect, the government could lose or remove a party and still control a majority of the seats in the legislature. Like minority governments, surplus majority cabinets have often been considered peculiar and uncommon forms of government in parliamentary democracies. The data do not support this view, however. As Figure 11.5a

16. We do not show exactly how to make these calculations here because they are beyond the methodological scope of this book. Students who are interested in how to make these types of calculations are encouraged to take classes in statistics.

17. Martin and Stevenson (2001, 46) present results consistent with the claim that minority governments are more likely when there are strong parties. Specifically, they find that strong parties "tend to get into government and, even more, to rule alone." Golder (2006), however, shows that Martin and Stevenson's results come from a slightly misspecified model. Once corrected, their model provides no evidence that minority governments are more common in the presence of strong parties.

indicates, a little under a fifth (17.1 percent) of all governments that formed in West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998 were surplus majority governments. In fact, surplus majority governments have made up almost half the governments in Italy (46 percent) and the Netherlands (45 percent). In addition to their numerical frequency, surplus majority governments have also been in power for reasonably long stretches of time. For example, surplus majority cabinets have ruled in Western Europe for about 12.2 percent of the postwar period (Figure 11.5b). Moreover, each surplus majority government remained in power for well over a year (536 days) on average.

Several arguments have been proposed to explain the apparent puzzle as to why surplus majority governments form. Just as with minority governments, these arguments emphasize the importance of policy in the government formation process. If politicians were purely office seekers, then it is hard to see why surplus majority governments would ever form, because they require political actors to give up office when they do not have to. This implies that the very existence of surplus majority governments must be a signal that policy matters.

Surplus majority governments have often formed in times of political, economic, or military crisis. These crisis governments are sometimes referred to as “national unity” governments. For example, national unity governments formed in Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands immediately after World War II. They also formed in several East European countries following the collapse of communism in 1989. A national unity government formed in Iraq following the 2006 legislative elections. The belief is that only by bringing together parties from across the ideological spectrum and giving them a reason to be invested in the existing political system is it possible to resolve whatever crisis is afflicting the country. The goal is to put the everyday partisan, ethnic, or religious nature of politics on hold for the sake of the country’s immediate future. Although governments of national unity often have strong popular support, this particular type of surplus majority government tends to be short-lived in practice. Political parties that are not required to sustain a legislative majority are often quickly pushed into opposition. The reason is that the desire on the part of politicians to enjoy as much office and policy influence as possible often overrides the wishes of the electorate that parties work together to rescue a country from whatever ails it.

In some circumstances, the formation of a surplus majority government may actually be necessary to pass particular pieces of legislation. For example, constitutional amendments often require “supermajorities,” which are made up of more than a legislative majority. If a government wants to pass a constitutional amendment that requires a supermajority, then it might choose to have more parties in the cabinet than are strictly necessary just to remain in power. Of course, the surplus majority government in this case does not actually contain more parties than are strictly necessary to pass the constitutional amendment. In fact, you might say that this type of government is “oversized” in name only and that in practice it is no different from a minimal winning coalition, given its policy objectives. A country that produces this type of surplus majority government is Belgium (Gallagher, Laver, and Mair 2006, 392). The Belgian constitution requires that laws affecting the relationship between

different language groups in the country require the support of two-thirds of the legislators and a majority of each language group. This has led to several surplus majority governments in Belgium.

Another explanation for the formation of surplus majority governments focuses on the strategic interaction between coalition partners or between actors within parties. If a minimal winning coalition takes office, any party in the cabinet, no matter how small, can bring the government down simply by resigning. This situation allows for the possibility of blackmail by a single dissatisfied party (Luebbert 1984, 254). In particular, it allows a small party to extract significant policy concessions from its coalition partners in vast disproportion to its size simply because its votes are critical to the government's continuing existence. To prevent this scenario, larger parties in the coalition may decide to form surplus majority coalitions so that the government is not automatically brought down if a single party decides to resign. Parties that lack party discipline and suffer from high levels of internal dissent may also choose to form surplus majority governments for similar reasons. In effect, parties that cannot guarantee that their own legislators will always vote the party line might agree to share office and policy influence with other parties in return for the legislative support necessary to remain in power. Finally, the fact that parties typically agree on a set of coalition policies prior to forming the government but ultimately have to implement these policies in some order also creates incentives for surplus majority governments (Carruba and Volden 2000). Consider two parties that agree on a set of coalition policies prior to coming to power. As soon as one of the parties has managed to implement the policies that it wants, it will have an incentive to defect from the government and bring it down if it does not like any of the policies still to be introduced. This incentive is reduced with a surplus majority coalition, because the defection of one party will not prevent the government from implementing the remaining policies.

Preelectoral Coalitions

So far we have assumed that parties in parliamentary democracies wait until after elections before thinking about what government to form. This is certainly how most political scientists have thought about the government formation process. This, however, is not always the case. The fact that single parties are unable to command a majority of support in the legislature in most democracies typically means that parties who wish to be in the government have to form some sort of coalition. In effect, parties can either form a **preelectoral coalition**

A **preelectoral coalition** is a collection of parties that do not compete independently at election time. A **government coalition** is one that forms after the election.

with another party (or parties) prior to election in the hope of governing together afterward if successful at the polls, or they can compete independently and hope to form a

government coalition after the election. Most scholars have focused almost exclusively on the government coalitions that form after elections and ignored preelectoral coalitions. An exception is Golder (2006). In an analysis of twenty-three advanced industrial democracies, she shows that preelectoral coalitions are not only common but also that they affect election

outcomes, have a strong impact on the government formation process, and have significant policy and normative implications.¹⁸

A preelectoral coalition is a collection of parties that do not compete independently at election time either because they publicly agree to coordinate their campaigns, run joint candidates or joint lists, or enter government together following the election. Preelectoral coalitions come in various types that differ in the extent to which parties coordinate their electoral strategies. These types are shown in Table 11.9.

Nomination agreements between parties represent a relatively high level of electoral coordination because the parties agree to present a coalition candidate in each district rather than each party putting up their own candidate. Nomination agreements are a typical form of electoral coordination in countries with single-member districts. For example, parties in France often choose to nominate a single coalition candidate in each district before the first round of elections or they agree to withdraw their respective candidates in favor of a coalition candidate prior to the second round of voting. The Liberal Party and the newly formed Social Democratic Party also reached nomination agreements in the United Kingdom during the 1980s. The two parties “recognized that competition between them would be mutually destructive . . . [and] they quickly worked out an electoral pact in which constituencies were allocated between the two parties, so that nowhere would they oppose each other” (Rasmussen 1991, 168). Joint lists also represent a relatively high level of electoral coordination because they involve parties agreeing to a single list of coalition candidates. Joint party lists are quite common in Israel, where parties run under a new coalition name. They also occur in Greece, the Netherlands, and Portugal.

A slightly lower level of electoral coordination often occurs in countries where individuals get to cast two votes in different electoral tiers. In these countries, electoral coalitions often take the form of party leaders’ telling their supporters to cast one vote for their party and the second vote for their coalition partner (dual ballot instructions). This type of elec-

TABLE 11.9

Different Types of Preelectoral Coalition

Preelectoral coalition type	Degree of electoral coordination
Nomination agreement	
Joint lists	
Dual ballot instructions	
Vote transfer instructions	
Public commitment to govern together	



18. Other recent studies examining preelectoral coalitions include Ferrara and Herron (2005); Blais and Indriðason (2007); and Carroll and Cox (2007).

toral coalition occurs quite frequently in Germany, where individuals cast one vote for a constituency candidate elected by plurality rule and a second vote for a party list in a multi-member (regional) district. In Germany it is usually understood that the constituency vote will go to the candidate from the larger coalition member, whereas the list vote will go to the smaller partner to ensure that the small party passes the 5 percent electoral threshold. In countries in which voters get to rank their preferences over candidates and preferences are transferable, electoral coalitions often take the form of party leaders' telling their supporters to rank their own party first and a coalition partner second. For example, parties in Australia often give individuals "how-to-vote" cards outside polling stations with clear instructions on how to rank candidates so that the flow of preferences will benefit the party if it is running separately or the coalition if a preelectoral agreement is in place. Similar instructions are provided by party leaders to their supporters in Ireland.

Publicly stating an intention to govern together if successful at the polls represents the lowest level of electoral coordination.¹⁹ This type of electoral coalition occurs in many countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, and New Zealand. For example, the Alliance and Labour Party in New Zealand formed a loose electoral coalition in 1999 stating that they would govern together if they won the elections. Some parties actually make public commitments to *not* govern with certain other parties in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway, thereby effectively ruling out certain cabinet configurations (Strøm, Budge and Laver 1994; Müller and Strøm 2000). For example, all parties in Germany publicly rejected the possibility of forming a government with the Party of Democratic Socialism (the former Communist Party in East Germany) prior to the 1990, 1994, and 1998 elections.

Preelectoral coalitions are quite common. Table 11.10 provides information on 240 preelectoral coalitions at the national level in twenty-three advanced industrialized democracies from 1946 to 2002. Only Canada and Malta have no experience with preelectoral coalitions at the national level. Although some countries, such as Japan, Luxembourg, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom have had few electoral coalitions, others, such as Australia, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, and Portugal have had many. Preelectoral coalitions have competed in all Australian elections, 93.3 percent of Germany's elections, and 90 percent of Portugal's elections. About a third (29.2 percent) of the 240 preelectoral coalitions that formed made it into government. Indeed, about two-thirds of all the governments in Australia and France

19. Publicly stating that you will form a government if successful at the polls is another explanation for the formation of surplus majority governments. When coalition partners make a public statement such as this, they do not know if all of them will be needed to control a majority of the legislative seats. For example, it may turn out that one of the coalition partners can be jettisoned after the elections without losing the government's legislative majority. This situation occurred when the Socialists and Communists agreed to enter government together if they won the French legislative elections in 1981. Although the elections resulted in a majority for the Socialists, both parties honored their agreement and entered office as a surplus majority government. Why didn't the Socialists renege on their preelectoral pact and form a government on their own? It turns out that there is quite strong empirical evidence that public commitments to form governments are nearly always honored (Laver and Schofield 1998; Martin and Stevenson 2001). One explanation for this has to do with reputational effects—other parties may not agree to form preelectoral coalitions with parties that have reneged on such pacts in the past.

TABLE 11.10

Summary Information on National-Level Preelectoral Coalitions, 1946–2002

Country	Election years	Elections (no.)	PECs (no.)	Elections with PECs (%)	Governments based on PECs	
					(no.)	(%)
Australia	1946–2001	23	25	100.0	15	65.2
Austria	1949–2002	17	12	58.8	9	52.9
Belgium	1946–1999	18	14	61.1	1	5.6
Canada	1949–2000	17	0	0.0	0	0.0
Denmark	1947–2001	22	8	36.4	1	4.5
Finland	1948–1999	15	3	20.0	1	6.7
France	1946–2002	15	23	73.3	10	66.7
Germany	1949–2002	15	19	93.3	8	53.3
Greece ^a	1946–2000	19	25	73.7	4	21.1
Iceland	1946–1999	17	8	47.1	0	0.0
Ireland	1948–2002	17	9	47.1	5	29.4
Israel	1949–1999	15	26	86.7	0	0.0
Italy	1948–2001	14	9	35.7	2	14.3
Japan	1947–2000	20	2	5.0	0	0.0
Luxembourg	1954–1999	10	3	30.0	0	0.0
Malta	1966–1998	8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Netherlands	1946–2002	17	8	35.3	3	17.6
New Zealand	1946–2002	20	2	10.0	1	5.0
Norway	1949–2001	14	9	64.3	5	35.7
Portugal	1976–2002	10	14	90.0	2	20.0
Spain	1977–2000	8	11	87.5	1	12.5
Sweden	1948–2002	18	8	38.9	2	11.1
United Kingdom	1950–2001	15	2	13.3	0	0.0
Total		364	240		70	

Source: Data are from Golder (2006).

^aThe years 1968–1973 are not included.

during this time period, and one-half of German governments, have been based on preelectoral alliances. These data serve to demonstrate that coalition bargaining often occurs prior to elections in a wide range of countries and that a large proportion of government coalitions that ultimately form are based on preelectoral agreements. Golder (2006) finds that

potential government coalitions are 123 times more likely to become the actual government if they are based on a preelectoral pact than if they are not.

As with the governments that form after elections, the emergence of preelectoral coalitions is the result of a bargaining process among party leaders. For example, party leaders who wish to form a preelectoral coalition must reach agreement over a joint electoral strategy and the distribution of office benefits that might accrue to them. This may involve outlining a common coalition platform, deciding which party gets to run the more powerful ministerial posts, choosing which party's candidates should step down in favor of candidates from their coalition partners in particular districts, or determining which leader is to become prime minister. Clearly, the preelectoral coalition bargaining process involves a similar set of thorny distributional and ideological issues as the postelection government coalition bargaining process. One difference, though, between the preelectoral coalition formation process and the government coalition formation process is that there are electoral advantages from competing as a coalition at election time that are no longer relevant in the postelection context. This is particularly the case in countries with disproportional electoral systems that punish small parties. Ultimately, electoral coalitions can influence the probability of electoral victory, whereas government coalitions can't. It is largely for this reason that political parties sometimes choose to form a coalition prior to an election rather than wait until afterward.

In the simple model of government formation that we presented earlier, we suggested that government coalitions are more likely to form between ideologically similar parties. This led to the prediction that we should observe "connected" coalitions. There is good reason to believe that governments based on preelectoral coalitions will be even more ideologically compatible than government coalitions that are not based on electoral pacts. The reason for this is that the "ideological compatibility constraint" facing potential coalitions is likely to be stronger prior to elections than afterward, because voters might be unwilling to vote for electoral coalitions made up of parties with incompatible or incoherent policy preferences; after the election, parties have more leeway to enter into these types of government coalitions because voters are no longer such an immediate constraint on politicians' actions.²⁰ Of course, parties do feel constrained to some extent in their coalition choices even after an election because voters could potentially punish ideologically incompatible governments at subsequent elections. If party leaders think that a particular incompatible coalition is likely to be successful in office, however, then they may gamble that voters will not punish them at the next election. Party leaders may also prefer to get the benefits of office and the ability to make policy today even though they know that they will be punished in the future.

20. The fact that party leaders often invest considerable resources to explicitly measure the expected electoral consequences of a coalition indicates that they are fully aware of the dangers of forming an ideologically incompatible coalition (Kaminski 2002). Some parties employ private polling companies to carry out surveys asking voters whether they would support particular coalition arrangements (Kaminski 2001). Others engage in coalition experiments at the regional level to evaluate the performance of particular combinations of parties. Based on these local experiences, party leaders then decide whether these coalitions should be implemented at the national level (Downs 1998).

The Manifesto Research Group provides estimates of the ideological position of parties on the traditional left-right policy dimension by examining the manifestos of political parties in numerous countries around the world (Budge et al. 2001). From these data it is possible to create a measure of a government's ideological spread—the distance between the left-most and right-most government party. Using such a measure, Golder (2006) finds that governments based on preelectoral coalitions are, indeed, more ideologically compatible than government coalitions that are not based on electoral pacts. She also finds that these governments are significantly more likely to be connected coalitions as well. One of the implications of her analysis is that the policy position of a government based on an electoral pact is likely to be more congruent with the preferences of its electorate than the policy position of governments that are not constrained by a preelectoral agreement.

Preelectoral coalitions can have quite significant effects on election outcomes and government policies. Consider the following simple example. Imagine a legislative election with single-member districts in which there are two blocs of parties, one on the left and one on the right. The left-wing bloc has more electoral support than the right. Suppose that the parties on the right form an electoral coalition and field a common candidate in each district but the parties on the left compete independently. The left would most likely lose in this situation. In this example, the possibility arises that a majority of voters could vote for a group of politicians who support similar policies and that these politicians might still lose the election by failing to coordinate sufficiently. The result is that a right-wing party is elected to implement policies that a majority of the voters do not want. In other words, the absence of a preelectoral coalition on the left can have a significant impact on the election outcome, the government that forms, and the policies that are likely to be implemented. If you believe that the candidate with the most support among the electorate should be elected to implement policy, it matters whether political elites choose electoral strategies and coalitions that make them more or less likely to win elections.

The simple example that we just outlined might be considered a good description of what happened in the French presidential elections in 2002. It had widely been expected that Jacques Chirac, the president and leader of the mainstream right, would make it through to the second round of voting along with Lionel Jospin, the Socialist prime minister and leader of the mainstream left. The real question for months had been which of the two men would win the second round. Then, unexpectedly, the left vote was split among so many candidates in the first round that the Socialist leader came in third, behind the extreme-right politician Jean-Marie Le Pen. The French press described the event as an earthquake, and the French elections were for a couple of weeks the subject of world-wide speculation. In reality, there was little chance that Le Pen would be elected president, and Chirac easily won the runoff election two weeks later. Most analyses of this particular election focus on the disturbing success of the extreme right. This political “earthquake,” however, had as much to do with the inability of the French left to form a coherent preelectoral coalition as it did with an increase in the strength of the extreme right. The result of the left’s failure to form a preelectoral coalition was that the French electorate got a right-wing government implement-

ing right-wing policies even though there was good reason to think that a relative majority of the voters wanted a left-wing cabinet—opinion polls at the time suggested that Jospin may well have won a head-to-head contest with Chirac if he could have just made it to the second round. Ironically, the popularity of left-wing parties among the voters may have

emboldened their leaders to run alone rather than in coalition—a decision that, in the end, led to their electoral failure.

Preelectoral coalitions also have important normative implications. One would like to think that voters choose their governments through the electoral process. A government, however, forms beyond the scrutiny of the electorate whenever the election does not produce a single-party majority government or whenever parties begin the government formation process after the election. In countries that employ proportional electoral rules, elections often serve “primarily as devices for electing representative agents in postelection bargaining processes, rather than as devices for choosing a specific executive” (Huber 1996,



A voter compares the campaign manifestos of Jacques Chirac and Jean-Marie Le Pen ahead of the second round of voting in the French presidential elections, held on May 5, 2002.

185). Voters often end up voting for a single, unaligned party, not knowing what, if any, government it would join. This disconnect between the voters and the government formation process in these countries is a problem, because it is not always clear whether the final coalition that takes office has the support of the electorate in a meaningful sense. Preelectoral coalitions can help to alleviate this problem by helping voters to identify government alternatives and register their support for one of them (Powell 2000). In fact, party leaders in Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands have made this type of argument publicly to appeal to voters. Arguably, electoral coalitions also increase democratic transparency and provide coalitions with as much of a mandate as single parties. By providing a direct link between the voters and the cabinet that proposes and implements policy, preelectoral coalitions help to undermine the criticism of parliamentary democracies that employ proportional representation electoral rules, namely, that governments lack a convincing mandate from the voters and that the quality of representative democracy is thereby diminished. We return to some of these normative issues in Chapter 15.

Duration of Governments: Formation and Survival

As we have illustrated, the government formation process in parliamentary democracies can be very complicated and quite complex. Even if parties agree to go into government together, they still have to haggle over who gets which portfolio and what the government policy should be. This bargaining process can sometimes last a long time. Table 11.11 presents

TABLE 11.11

Duration of Government Formation Process after Elections, 1945–1998 (days)

Country	Minimum	Maximum	Average	N
Austria	23	129	52.1	15
Belgium	2	148	59.7	17
Denmark	0	35	9.5	21
Finland	25	80	54.7	14
France (5th Republic)	1	11	3.5	11
Germany	23	73	36.4	14
Iceland	1	76	30.6	16
Ireland	7	48	18.7	16
Italy	11	126	47.3	14
Luxembourg	19	52	32.0	9
Netherlands	31	208	85.7	16
Norway	0	16	2.50	13
Portugal	1	45	24.0	7
Spain	2	58	28.6	7
Sweden	0	25	5.7	17
United Kingdom	1	18	7.8	14
All	0	208	31.8	221

Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: Bargaining duration measures the number of days between the election and the day on which the new government is officially inaugurated.

information about the length of time in days that it typically takes governments to form after an election in sixteen West European countries from 1945 to 1998.²¹

As Table 11.11 illustrates, there is considerable cross-national variation in the length of time that it takes to form a government following an election. If a single party obtains a majority of the legislative seats, then it is normally understood that this party will form a cabinet on its own and the only question is who from this party will get which portfolio. This explains why it takes only about a week (7.8 days) on average for a cabinet to form in the United Kingdom. In countries in which many parties gain legislative representation, it can

21. The data in Table 11.11 refer only to governments that form after elections. However, governments also form in interelection periods after an incumbent cabinet falls. The average length of time that it takes to form a government in an interelection period is only 13.5 days. This is a statistically significantly shorter period of time than the government formation process that follows an election. Only in Norway and Spain do interelection cabinets take longer to form on average.

take much longer to form a cabinet, because it is not always obvious which combination of parties will be able to form the government, how these parties will allocate portfolios among themselves, and what the coalition policy will be.²² For example, the average length of the government formation process in the Netherlands is about three months (85.7 days). In fact, the longest delay in government formation in this sample of countries occurred in the Netherlands at almost seven months, or 208 days. It is not uncommon for a *formateur* to fail to form a coalition on the first or even the second attempt in some countries without single-party majorities. For instance, it took seven different government coalition proposals more than 106 days for a government to finally form after the 1979 Belgian legislative elections. Overall, the average length of time that it takes to form a government after an election in Western Europe is about a month (31.8 days).

The first democratic elections in Iraq occurred on January 30, 2005. It was not until April 28, however, fully 88 days later, that an Iraqi government actually took office. This delay in the Iraqi government formation process was a cause of some concern around the world. Much of the world's media, along with the American government, blamed the delay on the lack of democratic experience among Iraqi politicians—they simply did not have any experience with democracy or putting a government coalition together. Although the Iraqis were certainly faced with some additional difficulties not present in most other parliamentary systems, it should be noted that the length of time that it took them to form a government was about the same as the average length of time it takes the Dutch to form a government after elections. In fact, there are at least sixteen instances in which cabinet negotiations in Western Europe lasted longer than 88 days—in some cases much longer. The Iraqis did not come close to matching the 208 days that it took to form the Dutch government in 1977. The point here is that we do not argue that such delays in Austria, Belgium, Iceland, Italy, or the Netherlands were caused by unfamiliarity with democratic politics. It is simply part and parcel of most parliamentary systems that election results do not regularly determine the identity of the government. Instead, elections usher in what can be quite a long period of negotiations in which party leaders bargain over the composition of the government cabinet. Delays of several months are not infrequent, even in highly established democracies with considerable experience in building coalition governments.

Delays in the government formation process can have important implications for governance. You may recall that caretaker governments, which administer the affairs of state while negotiations are proceeding, do not generally have the authority to make major policy initiatives. This means that delays in the government formation process can be quite problematic, particularly if the previous cabinet has fallen because of some sort of crisis. Until a cabinet is finally formed, the identity of government parties, the allocation of portfolios to

22. In addition, nonpolitical factors such as holidays affect the length of time between the election and the date the new government takes office. For instance, forming the German government at the end of the year in 1990 took extra time because of the Christmas holidays.

particular politicians, and the content of policy compromises among coalition partners have yet to be determined. The uncertainty that surrounds the future direction of government policy can have serious consequences on the behavior of economic and political actors, both domestic and international (Martin and Vanberg 2003, 323–324). For example, consider the seven-month delay in forming a government that followed the June 2006 elections in the Czech Republic. By August, the Czech media were already reporting on the deleterious consequences of the prolonged period under a caretaker government. The *Prague Post Online* (August 24, 2006) wrote, “Lawmakers are getting nothing done, while legislation and important reforms rest in a state of limbo, including long awaited pension reform, the privatization of many state-owned companies, an overhaul of the country’s Criminal Code, and the fate of the controversial flat tax. A nonfunctioning parliament costs taxpayers as much as 3 million Kč (\$136,500) a day.” A number of recent empirical studies paint a similar picture, finding that uncertainty over the government formation process affects exchange rate markets (Leblang 2002), stock market volatility (Leblang and Mukherjee 2006), and the types of assets that market actors choose to invest in (Bernhard and Leblang 2006). Delays in government formation have real consequences for many people.

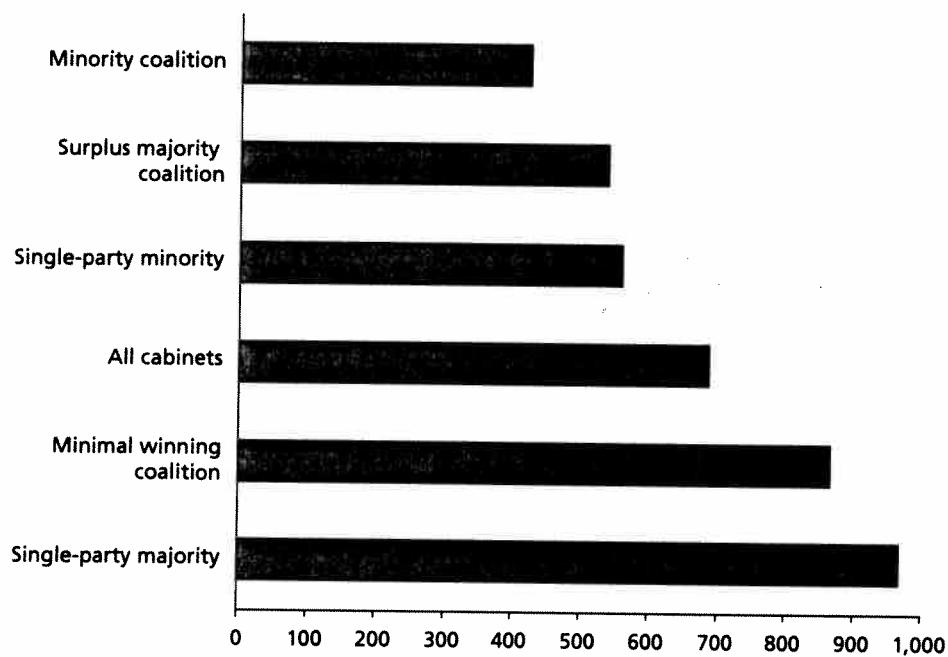
Only limited research has been conducted on the factors that affect the length of bargaining delays in forming governments. Diermeier and van Roozendaal (1998) argue that delays are caused by uncertainty regarding the preferences of the parties involved in the formation process. For example, it may take time to figure out the best offer of policy and portfolio allocation that would be acceptable to the party leaders involved in the coalition negotiations—the greater the uncertainty regarding the relevant bargaining parameters, the longer the formation time. Martin and Vanberg (2003) argue that delays are caused by complexity in the bargaining environment. The more complex the bargaining situation, the longer the bargaining delays.

More recently, Golder (2007) has argued that uncertainty and bargaining complexity both matter. Using data on sixteen countries from 1946 to 1998, she finds that governments take longer to form after elections (increased uncertainty) than during interelection periods and when there are many ideologically diverse parties in the legislature (increased complexity). Following an election, the party composition in the legislature is different, parties may have new platforms, and there may be membership turnover within the parties. Party leaders are likely to learn about what policies are feasible for potential government cabinets and which would likely lead to their breakup through their day-to-day negotiations over legislative proposals. As a result, policy leaders will be less certain about which potential cabinets are acceptable to a legislative majority right after an election than after an extended period of legislative interaction. This increased uncertainty after elections leads to delays in the government formation process. Having many ideologically diverse parties increases the complexity of the bargaining environment facing formateurs. For example, the formateur will likely have to negotiate with many potential coalition partners and make many offers and counteroffers if there are many parties. If the parties in the legislature are also ideologically diverse, then it is likely that the formateur will have to bargain with at least one party that

does not hold similar positions on several different types of policy as well. In effect, bargaining complexity leads to delays in the formation of governments because it makes it difficult for the formateur to gather the information that the formateur is uncertain about, that is, the parameters of the best offer that would be acceptable to potential government partners.

Not only is there considerable variation in the length of time that it takes to form governments, but there are also large differences in the amount of time that various governments survive in power. Of the governments that formed in thirteen West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998, only 20 percent actually stayed in office for their maximum permitted term. On average, governments lasted only 60 percent of their permitted time in office; this average ranged from 84 percent in the Netherlands to 33 percent in Italy. In Figure 11.6, we illustrate the average duration of governments in days by cabinet type in thirteen parliamentary democracies in Western Europe from 1945 to 1998. Single-party majority governments last the longest at 967 days on average. Minimal winning coalitions last only slightly less time at 864 days. Both of these types of government last considerably longer (about a year in all) than minority or surplus majority governments.

FIGURE 11.6

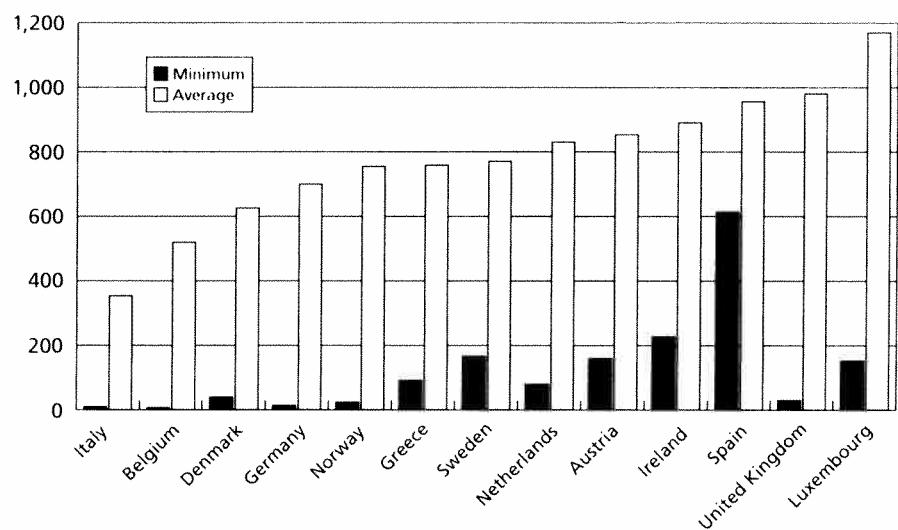
Average Government Duration by Cabinet Type, 1945–1998 (days)


Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: Data cover thirteen West European parliamentary democracies.

In Figure 11.7, we illustrate the minimum and average duration of governments by country in days. As you can see, there is considerable cross-national variation in the length of time a government stays in office. Governments last longest on average in Luxembourg (1,170 days), the United Kingdom (981 days), and Spain (957 days). They last much less time in Italy (354 days) and Belgium (520 days).

You might think that all political scientists measure government duration in the same way. How hard can it be to measure how long a government lasts? Unfortunately, scholars measure government duration in many different ways. All agree that a government ends if the party composition of the cabinet changes either because an incumbent party leaves or a new party joins. But that's about it. What's the problem? Ask yourself whether we should classify a government as new if the same parties are in power after an election as before the election. Would you consider it a new government if the same parties are in power but completely different individuals fill the ministerial portfolios (cabinet reshuffle)? What if the prime minister changes? What if the party composition of the cabinet changes slightly but virtually all the incumbent ministers get to keep their old positions? Measuring government duration is a surprisingly difficult issue (Golder and Ryals 2008). The data that we present on government duration in this chapter define the end of a government as occurring if (a) there is any change in the set of parties holding cabinet membership, (b) there is any change in the identity of the prime minister, or (c) there has been a general election.

FIGURE 11.7**Minimum and Average Duration of Governments, 1945–1998 (days)**

Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Governments end for both “technical” and “discretionary” reasons (Müller and Strøm 2000, 25–27). Technical reasons are things that are beyond the control of the government. For example, a government might end because the prime minister dies or resigns due to ill health, or because there is a constitutionally mandated election. In our sample of thirteen West European parliamentary democracies from 1945 to 1998, 37 percent of governments ended for technical reasons. Discretionary reasons are political acts on the part of the government or opposition. For instance, a government might end because the government dissolves the parliament and calls early elections, because the opposition defeats the government in a vote of no confidence, or because conflicts between or within the coalition parties force the government to resign. These discretionary reasons are obviously not mutually exclusive. Of the governments in our sample, 63 percent ended for discretionary reasons. We indicate how many governments fell for particular technical and discretionary reasons in Table 11.12. Over a quarter of the cabinets ended because the government called early elections. The ability of governments to choose when to have an election is known as endogenous election timing (see Box 11.4). Only thirty-four governments ended as a result of a parliamentary defeat. Still, not too much should be read into this relatively low number, because governments often resign in order to avoid being defeated in a vote of no confidence.

TABLE 11.12

Number of Governments That Fell for Technical and Discretionary Reasons in Thirteen West European Parliamentary Democracies, 1945–1998

	Specific reason	No.
Technical		
	Constitutionally mandated election	81
	Other constitutional reason	25
	Death of PM	6
Discretionary		
	Early election	91
	Enlargement of government	13
	Parliamentary defeat	34
	Intercoalition conflict over policy	62
	Intercoalition conflict not related to policy	20
	Intraparty conflict	51
Technical		111
Discretionary		191
Total		302

Source: Data are from the Constitutional Change and Parliamentary Democracies project. (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: The different technical and discretionary reasons for why governments fall are not mutually exclusive. In other words, governments can fall, within the technical or discretionary categories, for more than one reason. This explains why the numbers shown above do not sum exactly to the total number of governments that end because of technical (111) or discretionary (191) reasons.

11.4

ENDOGENOUS ELECTION TIMING

In some countries, the government gets to choose when it wants to hold elections. For example, the government in the United Kingdom is constrained to hold an election at least once every five years but can choose exactly when to hold the election in this five-year window. We refer to this possibility as endogenous election timing. Three different stories have been proposed to explain the timing of elections. All three stories assume that politicians want to win elections and that voters hold governments accountable for their past economic performance.

1. *Political surfing*: The government waits until the economic conditions are right before calling an election. The government does not actively manipulate the economy but waits until the economy, for whatever reason, is at a high point before announcing the election (Kayser 2005).
2. *Political business cycle*: The government actively manipulates the economy to engineer a short-term economic high and then calls an election. The election is then followed by an economic decline. Thus, the economy goes through cycles of boom and bust that are politically driven (Clark 2003).
3. *Signaling*: The government is better informed about future economic performance than the voters and so can time elections to occur prior to any expected economic decline. In other words, the government calls early elections in order to cash in on its past successes by censoring the public's ability to observe the future decline. The very act of calling an early election, however, effectively sends a signal to voters that the future performance of the economy looks bad. If voters are naive or have short-term memories, or if the opposition is unprepared, the government may prefer to call an early election. Otherwise, governments might be reluctant to take advantage of good economic times by calling an early election because they want to avoid sending voters a signal that they don't expect the good times to last (Smith 2003).

Several different predictions can be derived from these stories. First, let's consider predictions about economic performance. Both the political surfing and political business cycle stories predict that elections are called when the economy is doing well, whereas the signaling story says that current economic conditions should not matter. Both the political business cycle and signaling stories predict that calls for early elections should be followed by economic declines (if for different reasons), but the political surfing story makes no prediction about future economic performance. The signaling story predicts that the support of the government in the opinion polls will fall if it calls early elections because voters learn that the government is about to produce bad economic outcomes; the other stories have nothing to say about the electoral support of the government. The signaling story predicts that the earlier an election is called, the greater the economic decline to come—why else risk losing office? The other stories make no such prediction.

continues

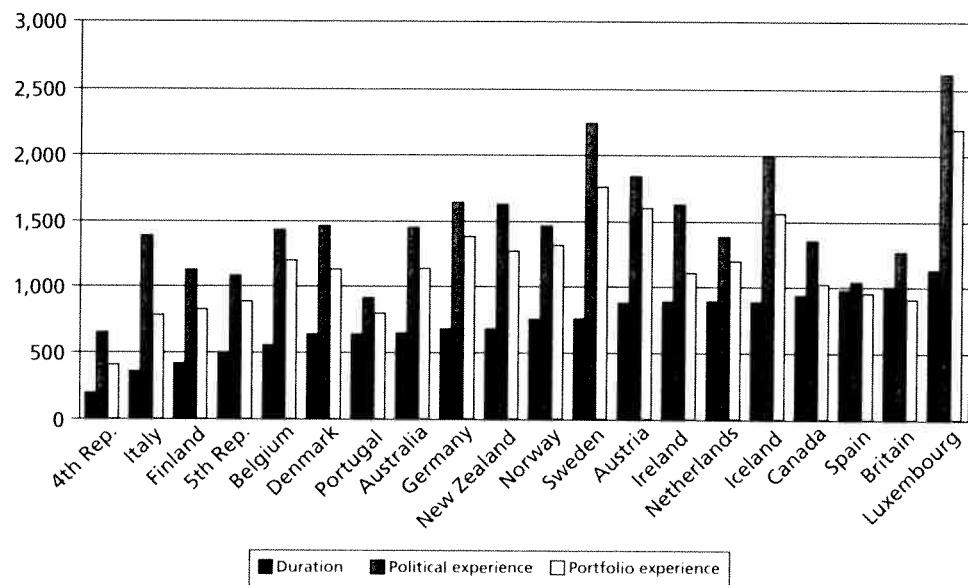
Smith (2004) has tested these predictions on data from the United Kingdom and finds strongest support for the signaling story. He finds that when elections are called early relative to expectations, then the support for the government declines, postelection outcomes decline, electoral campaigns are short, and stock market indexes decline. When elections are called especially early, he finds that the economy later performs particularly badly. There was little evidence that the current performance of the economy affected the likelihood that a government would call an early election. All of these findings are consistent with the signaling story but not the other stories.

Over the past few decades, there have been numerous studies of government duration (King et al. 1990; Warwick 1994; Lupia and Strøm 1995; Diermeier and Stevenson 1999). They have examined how various attributes of the government, the legislature, and the country affect the survival of governments. In regard to government attributes, it has been found that cabinets last longer if they are majority governments (rather than minority governments), if they are single-party governments (rather than coalition governments), and if the government exhibits low ideological diversity in its party membership. In regard to legislative attributes, it has been found that more legislative parties lead to a reduction in government duration. In regard to country attributes, some have found that investiture vote requirements diminish average government duration (King et al. 1990; Warwick 1994).

How and why does it matter whether or not a government survives for a long time? It is perhaps a natural reaction to think that cabinet instability is a bad thing, but why exactly might this be the case? You might think that governments that do not survive long result in policy instability and cabinet ministers who lack portfolio experience and political experience more generally. It has long been known, however, that cabinet instability does not automatically imply ministerial instability. For example, Allum (1973, 119) found that a set of politicians had been “in office almost continuously for over twenty years” during the heyday of cabinet instability in Italy. In a recent study, Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2004) also show that cabinet instability does not necessarily lead to high levels of turnover in cabinet membership. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo measured cabinet duration, portfolio experience, and political experience in nineteen democracies from 1945 to 1999. Portfolio experience is measured as the average amount of experience in days that ministers have in the specific cabinet portfolio that they hold. Political experience is measured as the average amount of experience in days that ministers have in *any* significant cabinet portfolio. The results of their analysis are shown in Figure 11.8.²³

23. The average cabinet duration shown in Figure 11.8 may differ slightly from that in Figure 11.7 because Huber and Martinez-Gallardo use a different source and measure: Woldendorp, Keman, and Budge 1998.

FIGURE 11.8

Average Cabinet Duration, Political Experience, and Portfolio Experience, 1945–1999 (days)

Source: Huber and Martinez-Gallardo (2004, 38).

Note: "4th Rep[ublic]" refers to France in 1946–1958; "5th Rep[ublic]" refers to France in 1958.

As Figure 11.8 clearly illustrates, cabinet duration is not necessarily the same thing as political or portfolio experience. For example, cabinets in Britain, Canada, and the Netherlands last quite a long time but have low levels of portfolio and political experience because of the frequent cabinet reshuffles in these countries (Allum 1973; Indriðason and Kam 2005). In contrast, cabinets in Germany, Sweden, and Belgium do not last a long time but they have relatively high levels of portfolio and political experience because the same individuals are often returned to the cabinet and their former ministries. Huber and Martinez-Gallardo's analysis suggests that we should, perhaps, be less concerned about what affects cabinet duration and more interested in discovering what influences the degree of portfolio and political experience in a country. As yet, little research has been done in this area.

MAKING AND BREAKING GOVERNMENTS: PRESIDENTIAL DEMOCRACIES

As you can see, the literature on the government formation process in parliamentary democracies is vast and much has been learned. In contrast, relatively little is known about government formation in presidential regimes. One reason for this has been a lack of data. This situation has recently begun to change. With the emergence of new data has come a promising

and ambitious research agenda examining various aspects of governments in presidential democracies (Cheibub and Limongi 2002; Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh 2004; Amorim Neto 2006; Amorim Neto and Samuels 2006; Amorim Neto and Strøm 2006; Cheibub 2007). In this section we summarize some of the principal lines of research that have been followed so far.

Government Formation Process

The **government in a presidential democracy** comprises the president and the cabinet. The **president** is the political chief executive in a presidential democracy; he is also the head of state. In a presidential democracy, the executive branch and the government are the same thing.

Government formation process in presidential democracies is different in many important ways from that in parliamentary ones. First, and most fundamentally, legislative responsibility does not exist in presidential democracies. As a result, governments in presidential systems do not have to maintain majority legislative support as cabinets do in order to remain in office in parliamentary systems. Second, there is no uncertainty about the identity of the formateur in presidential democracies unlike in most parliamentary systems. This is because the president is always the formateur, irrespective of whether his party does well or poorly in legislative elections. Coupled with the absence of legislative responsibility, this means that the president appoints whomever he wants to the cabinet (and dismisses them as he wishes).²⁴ Third, the fact that the president is always the formateur means that the president's party must be included in each cabinet regardless of its legislative size. Note that this does not necessarily mean that the cabinet will exclude all other parties, just that it must include the president's party.

Finally, the "reversion point" of the government formation process is different in presidential democracies from that in parliamentary ones. A "reversion point" here refers to what happens when a minority formateur fails to form a coalition. In a parliamentary system, the failure of a minority prime minister to obtain an implicit legislative majority results in—or causes the actors to "revert" to—an early election, a new round of bargaining, or a caretaker government. In a presidential system, though, the failure of a minority president to win the support of opposition parties simply results in the president's party ruling alone. As a consequence, members of the legislative delegation of a government party can often vote against cabinet-sponsored bills

without the fear of forcing new elections (which they may lose). Consequently, a **portfolio coalition** does not imply a **legislative coalition** in presidential democracies to the extent that it does in parliamentary democracies.

A **portfolio coalition** is composed of those legislators belonging to parties in the cabinet. A **legislative coalition** is a voting bloc composed of legislators who support a piece of legislation.

24. Although it is true that presidents in the United States require senatorial consent to appoint each of their cabinet secretaries, this rarely prevents them from obtaining a cabinet of their own choosing.

These differences create particular incentives and opportunities that help to distinguish presidential governments from parliamentary ones. We will focus here on differences in the size and composition of governments.

The Size of Presidential Cabinets

In a parliamentary system, the prime minister must appoint a cabinet that enjoys an implicit legislative majority. We have seen that this does not necessarily imply that she must appoint a cabinet that controls a majority of legislative seats—opposition parties in the legislature may be willing to support minority cabinets on policy grounds. Clearly, presidents will form majority cabinets whenever their party controls a majority of the legislative seats. But what happens when the president's party is not a majority party? Presidents have no constitutional imperative to form majority cabinets—they are free to form minority cabinets whenever they want. Some of these minority presidential governments will rule with the support of an implicit legislative majority, just like minority governments in parliamentary systems; that is, some opposition party or parties in the legislature will support the government without receiving posts in the cabinet. Other minority presidential governments, however, will rule without this kind of support. This second type of minority government is not possible in a parliamentary system because of the existence of legislative responsibility. This difference suggests that, all things being equal, minority governments will be more frequent in presidential systems than in parliamentary systems.

The empirical evidence supports this claim. It is widely recognized that about a third of all parliamentary governments are minority governments (Strøm 1990). In contrast, Amorim Neto (2006) finds that 46 percent (49) of the governments in presidential regimes in Latin America from the late 1970s to 2000 were minority governments. This information is shown in Table 11.13. This difference in the frequency of minority governments in presidential and parliamentary systems is even more marked if we focus explicitly on minority situations, that is, situations in which the party of the president or prime minister does not control a majority of legislative seats. Data from Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh (2004, 574) on minority situations in the world from 1946 to 1999 indicate that 65 percent of these situations resulted in minority governments in presidential democracies compared with just 35 percent in parliamentary ones.

The fact that presidents can appoint whomever they like to the cabinet might lead you to think that they would rarely form coalition governments. Indeed, Linz (1994, 19) claims that coalition governments in presidential democracies are “exceptional.” Coalition governments would certainly be unexpected if political actors lived in a purely office-seeking world—why would they form a coalition and give up cabinet seats if they didn’t have to? As we noted earlier, however, political actors are likely to care to some extent about policy or, at least, to act as if they care about policy. If this is the case, then it is easy to see why presidents might have an incentive to form coalition governments. The extent to which this incentive is felt will depend to a large extent on the legislative powers of the president.

TABLE 11.13

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

Source: Data are from Amorim Neto (2006).

A presidential **decree** is an order by the president that has the force of law. The scope and extent of these decrees vary from country to country.

All presidents have the ability to issue a **decree**—a presidential order that has the force of law. The scope and strength of these decrees, however, vary from country to country

(Shugart and Carey 1992). For example, decrees in the United States, known as executive orders, allow the president only to regulate and interpret statutes already enacted by the legislature and give orders to the public administration; the president cannot enact *new* laws. In other countries, though, presidents can issue “decree-laws”—decrees that immediately become law—even when faced with a hostile legislature. Presidents who have relatively weak decree power and whose party does not control a majority of legislative seats need support from other parties if they are to achieve any of their policy goals. As a result, these presidents will have an incentive to try to form coalitions. The bottom line is that coalition governments should not be exceptional in presidential systems for this reason. In fact, the empirical evidence suggests that coalition governments occur quite frequently in presidential democracies. As Table 11.13 indicates, fully 73 percent (77) of the governments studied by Amorim Neto (2006) were coalition governments.

The frequency with which coalition governments form in presidential systems has led some scholars to conclude that “it is not true that incentives for coalition formation are any different in presidential than in parliamentary democracies” (Cheibub and Limongi 2002, 18). This

conclusion is probably premature, however. Why? Much has to do with the “reversion point” that we mentioned earlier. If negotiations over the formation of a coalition government break down in a presidential regime, the result is that the president’s party gets to rule on its own. This implies that the president ultimately has the last word over policy in a way that is not true of a prime minister (Samuels 2007). In a parliamentary system, we have seen that the prime minister may have to concede control over particular ministries to her cabinet partners in order to be able to form a government (Laver and Shepsle 1996). In a presidential system, the president does not face the same need to make such policy concessions. This is particularly the case if he can use presidential decrees or vetoes to achieve his policy goals. Even if the president does make policy concessions in order to get opposition parties to join his cabinet, these policy promises lack a certain amount of credibility, because the president has the right to dismiss these parties without losing office whenever he wants. The ability of some presidents to use decrees and the inability of opposition parties to bring the government down, therefore, reduces the expected benefits (in regard to both office and policy) of opposition parties that are thinking about joining the government. The fact that legislators belonging to coalition parties can vote against government-sponsored bills without running the risk of causing the government to fall, however, implies that the costs (in regard to committing support to the government’s legislative agenda) of belonging to a coalition may also be lower. Thus, although presidents may want to form coalition governments in some circumstances, it is not clear that they will always find willing coalition partners; if they do find coalition partners, they are likely to be less reliable.

Two implications follow from this logic. First, although coalition governments should not be exceptional in presidential democracies, they should definitely be less common than in parliamentary ones. Again, there is some empirical evidence to support this. When examining minority situations in the world between 1946 and 1999, Cheibub, Przeworski, and Saiegh (2004) found that coalitions formed 78 percent of the time in parliamentary democracies but only 54 percent of the time in presidential ones. The second implication is that coalition governments in presidential systems may be more unstable and survive a shorter amount of time, all things being equal, than coalition governments in parliamentary countries. Alternatively, coalitions in presidential regimes may survive as long as coalitions in parliamentary regimes, but they may not govern as effectively because it is possible for a portfolio coalition to outlive the legislative coalition implied by its membership. To our knowledge, these last two hypotheses are yet to be tested. Can you think of how someone might test them?

The Composition of Presidential Cabinets

We have just illustrated that presidential democracies tend to be characterized by more minority governments and fewer coalition governments than parliamentary ones. It turns out that the composition of presidential cabinets also differs systematically from parliamentary cabinets. On average, presidents appoint cabinets that contain a higher proportion of nonpartisan ministers. A nonpartisan minister is someone who does not come from the legislature; he might be someone like a technocrat, a crony, or a representative of an interest group. On average, presidents also allocate cabinet portfolios in a less proportional way than

prime ministers (Amorim Neto and Samuels 2006). Table 11.14 provides empirical evidence in support of these claims from thirty parliamentary and thirteen presidential democracies from 1980 to 2000.

To a large extent, the composition of cabinets in any type of democracy will reflect the extent to which formateurs must negotiate with political parties. Although political parties exert a relatively strong impact over the allocation of cabinet seats in parliamentary systems, this is not necessarily the case in presidential democracies. Prime ministers almost always appoint partisan ministers—individuals from political parties in the legislature—to the cabinet as a way of building the legislative majority that they need to stay in power. As we saw earlier, it is for precisely the same reason that prime ministers tend to allocate cabinet seats in proportion to the seats each party provides to the government coalition. Recall that this was the basis for Gamson's Law. Because presidents do not depend on having a legislative majority to stay in office, they do not have to negotiate with political parties to the same extent as prime ministers. As a result, they are much freer to vary both the partisan nature and proportionality of their cabinets.

On the whole, presidential democracies will have fewer partisan ministers and lower cabinet proportionality than parliamentary ones. Some presidential cabinets, however, will look more like parliamentary ones than others. This is because of the variation in the legislative powers of presidents that we mentioned earlier. Presidents can choose to achieve their policy goals either through the legislature or through decrees. Those presidents who have relatively weak decree power, whose parties in the legislature are quite small, and whose parties exhibit low levels of party discipline are likely to appoint cabinets that look more like those from parliamentary democracies—more partisan ministers and a more proportional allocation of cabinet portfolios—because they rely on winning the support of opposition parties to pass their policies. As Table 11.15 illustrates, there is considerable variation in the extent to which presidents appoint partisan and proportional cabinets. Cabinets tend to be very partisan and highly proportional in countries like Costa Rica, Mexico, and the United States but much less so in countries like Brazil, Peru, and Venezuela. Amorim Neto (2006) has shown that this variation is systematically related to the need of presidents to negotiate with opposition parties to achieve their policy objectives.

TABLE 11.14

Government Composition in Thirteen Presidential and Thirty Parliamentary Democracies, 1980–2000

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

Source: Numbers are based on data from Amorim Neto and Samuels (2006).

Note: Proportionality is measured from 0 to 1, with 1 being perfect proportionality.

TABLE 11.15

**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
United States	0.0	0.91
Uruguay	1.5	0.77
Venezuela	43.7	0.56
Total	29.2	0.64

Source: Data are from Amorim Neto (2006).

Note: The proportionality of cabinet portfolio allocation refers to the extent to which government parties receive the same percentage of cabinet posts as the percentage of seats they provide to the government majority.

MAKING AND BREAKING GOVERNMENTS: MIXED DEMOCRACIES

A mixed democracy is one in which the government depends on both the legislature and president to stay in power. Relatively little research has been conducted on government formation in presidential democracies, but even less has been done on mixed democracies. This is likely to change with the growing number of countries that have become mixed democracies in recent years. In Eastern Europe, Armenia, Croatia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, and the Ukraine all adopted mixed forms of democracy following their democratic transitions in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

The **government in a mixed democracy** comprises a prime minister and a cabinet, as in a parliamentary democracy. Whereas the executive branch and the government are the same thing in a parliamentary democracy, however, this is not the case in a mixed democracy. In a mixed democracy, the executive branch comprises the government *and* a president—the

The **government in a mixed democracy** comprises a prime minister and a cabinet. In a mixed democracy, the executive branch comprises the government and a president—the president is part of the executive branch but not part of the government.

president is part of the executive branch but not part of the government. Both the president and prime minister are involved in the day-to-day administration of the state. The precise way in which executive power is divided between the president and the prime minister varies from one mixed democracy to another. It is often the case, however, that the president has more influence in matters of foreign policy, whereas the prime minister is more powerful in domestic politics. For example, a political convention has evolved to some extent in France that the president is responsible for foreign policy and the prime minister for domestic policy. In other countries, this type of division of power is more clearly stated in the constitution.

In mixed democracies, there is nothing to guarantee that the president and the prime minister will come from the same political party. Periods in which politicians from different political parties or blocs hold the positions of the president and prime minister are often

referred to as **cohabitation**. Because the president nearly always gets to appoint the prime minister in mixed democracies, why would the president ever appoint a prime minister from

an opposing political party? The answer has to do with the fact that the government (prime minister and cabinet) must enjoy the support of a legislative majority to remain in office. Thus, a president may need to appoint a prime minister from an opposition party when the president's party or political bloc does not control a majority of legislative seats. In effect, the potential for cohabitation results from the duality of the executive—an independently elected president, and a prime minister who must enjoy a legislative majority.

At first glance, cohabitation sounds very similar to divided government in the context of presidential democracies. Still, even though presidential democracies such as the United States have seen power shared between a president and a legislature of different political blocs, cohabitation is not a characteristic of such democracies. The main reason for this is that unlike in a mixed democracy, a president in a presidential system is free to appoint whomever he likes to the cabinet (and the legislature is able to appoint whomever it wants as its presiding officers). To make things a little clearer, consider the United States in 2006 after the Democrats had regained control of the House of Representatives from the Republicans. If the United States had allowed for cohabitation, then the new Democratic speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, would have been able to remove the cabinet appointed by the Republican president, George W. Bush, and replace it with a cabinet of her own choosing. This was not possible, though. The United States of 2006 had divided government, not cohabitation.

France has experienced three periods of cohabitation since 1986. Cohabitation could have occurred even earlier, in 1981, when a Socialist president, François Mitterrand, was voted into office (for a seven-year term) by the French electorate; at that time the legislature was controlled by a right-wing coalition. On coming to office, though, Mitterrand used his constitutional power to dissolve the legislature and call new legislative elections. In these elections, Mitterrand's Socialist Party won an absolute majority of seats, thereby preempting a period of cohabitation. France's first experience with cohabitation came just five years later when a right-wing coalition won a two-seat majority in the constitutionally mandated legislative elections in 1986. Despite the small size of the legislative majority, Mitterrand was

forced to appoint Jacques Chirac, the leader of the right-wing Gaullist RPR party, as prime minister because a left-wing prime minister would have been unacceptable to the right-wing majority in the legislature. An uneasy two-year period of cohabitation ensued in which each leader felt constrained by the powers of the other. This initial period of cohabitation came to an end in 1988 when Mitterrand defeated Chirac in presidential elections. Mitterrand immediately dissolved the legislature, and the Socialist Party won a sufficient number of legislative seats for him to be able, with the help of some centrist legislators, to appoint a left-wing prime minister.

In 1993 President Mitterrand found himself in a similar position to that in 1986, when a right-wing coalition won an 80 percent majority in the legislative elections. Mitterrand was again forced to appoint a right-wing politician, Edouard Balladur, to be prime minister. This second period of cohabitation ended when the right-wing candidate Jacques Chirac was elected president in 1995. Because the right already controlled a legislative majority, Chirac was able to appoint the right-wing's Alain Juppé as prime minister. This alignment of a right-wing president and a right-wing legislature should have lasted until the normally scheduled legislative elections in 1998. President Chirac made the ill-fated decision, however, to dissolve the legislature and call early elections in a strategic attempt to build more support for his reform policies. Chirac's plan backfired and the left won the 1997 legislative elections. As a result, Chirac was forced to appoint the leader of the Socialist Party, Lionel Jospin, as prime minister. Jospin remained prime minister until 2002, when Chirac was reelected president. On winning the presidential elections, Chirac immediately dissolved the legislature. Chirac's right-wing party, the UMP, won an overwhelming majority in the legislative elections that followed, allowing Chirac to appoint a right-wing prime minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and to end France's third period of cohabitation after five years.

For much of the history of the French Fifth Republic, it was thought that the president was the dominant political figure in French politics. The constitution provides the president with significant powers, such as the power to appoint the prime minister, the authority to dissolve the legislature (not more than once a year), and the ability to take on emergency powers if the integrity of France's territory is under threat. From 1958 to 1986, the president seemed to dominate both domestic and foreign policy in France. To all intents and purposes, France appeared to function like a presidential democracy during this period. The first period of cohabitation, though, quickly revealed that the dominance of the French president prior to 1986 was not automatic but was, in fact, contingent on the president's controlling a majority in the legislature. Without a legislative majority, the president is forced to defer on domestic politics and, to some extent, on foreign policy, to the prime minister.²⁵ In periods

25. The French constitution is somewhat ambiguous about the relative roles of the president and prime minister in regard to foreign policy. For example, although the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces and is authorized to negotiate and ratify international treaties (articles 14 and 15), the prime minister is responsible for national defense (article 21) and only the legislature is able to declare war (article 35). Over time a convention has emerged that foreign policy is a "reserved domain" of the president. However, this is occasionally challenged during periods of cohabitation. For example, both President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Chirac turned up at the 1986 G7 meeting in Tokyo. Unfortunately for Chirac, G7 protocol allowed only heads of state (Mitterrand) to attend the most important meetings and Chirac was able to attend only the plenary sessions (Giesbert 1996, 498).

of cohabitation, France functions very much like a parliamentary democracy with executive power lying in the hands of the prime minister and the cabinet. This has led some to claim that mixed democracy, at least in the case of France, is really just an alternation between presidential and parliamentary forms of government, depending on whether the president controls a legislative majority or not (Duverger 1980).

Other mixed democracies, such as Sri Lanka and the Ukraine, have also experienced cohabitation. In 2001 Sri Lanka experienced a bitter episode of cohabitation when President Chandrika Kumaratunga of the People's Alliance (PA) was forced to appoint her political opponent, Ranil Wickremasinghe of the United National Party (UNP), as prime minister following the success of the UNP in legislative elections. These two politicians held starkly different positions regarding the need to negotiate with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or Tamil Tigers, to end the decades-long civil war. President Kumaratunga had taken a staunchly militaristic approach to dealing with the LTTE prior to 2001, but Wickremasinghe immediately opened negotiations and eventually signed a permanent ceasefire with the LTTE in 2002. After indicating that she was willing to sack the prime minister if too many concessions were made, President Kumaratunga suspended the parliament and deployed troops to take control of the country when Wickremasinghe was away visiting the United States in 2003. The period of cohabitation that had started in 2001, therefore, ended with the president's putting Sri Lanka under a state of emergency.

Ukraine has also experienced cohabitation; in 2006 President Viktor Yuschenko was forced to appoint his political rival, Viktor Yanukovych, as prime minister. The rivalry between these two men dates back at least as far as the 2004 presidential elections, when the pro-Western Yuschenko eventually defeated the pro-Russian Yanukovych in rather controversial circumstances. During the bitter and often violent presidential electoral campaign, Yuschenko became extremely ill, and it was later alleged that he had been poisoned with dioxin, possibly by elements associated with the Security Service of the Ukraine (SBU) or the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB). Neither candidate won the required majority in the first round of voting to be elected president: Yuschenko obtained 39.87 percent of the vote just ahead of Yanukovych with 39.32 percent. The second round of voting, which was marred by significant electoral fraud, saw Yanukovych declared president. Due to the electoral irregularities, Yuschenko and his supporters refused to recognize the results. Following thirteen days of protest that became known as the Orange Revolution, the Ukrainian Supreme Court overturned the election results and ordered a rerun of the second round runoff, which Yuschenko eventually won with 51.99 percent of the vote. A year and a half later, the Party of Regions, led by Yanukovych, won the most seats in the 2006 legislative elections. Despite the obvious personal hostility between the two men, the legislative election results forced Yuschenko and Yanukovych to reach a compromise. Yuschenko eventually appointed Yanukovych to be prime minister in a coalition government that included both men's parties. Relations between the president and prime minister have not been smooth since this government formed, with both actors involved in an apparent power struggle. In April 2007, President Yuschenko dissolved parliament and called for new elections that he hoped would reduce the power of Yanukovych. This decision plunged Ukraine into a political crisis, with

legislators calling it a coup d'état and refusing to recognize it until the constitutional court ruled it legal. Eventually, both the president and prime minister agreed to hold new elections in an attempt to end weeks of political deadlock. For many, periods of cohabitation in mixed democracies can be characterized as an effective system of checks and balances. As these examples from Sri Lanka and the Ukraine illustrate, however, cohabitation can also be characterized by bitter and violent conflict when the political actors involved share starkly different ideologies and goals.



Viktor Yushchenko, a Western-leaning reformer (on the right), and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych, seen as an ally of Russia (on the left), appear in a television debate in Ukraine's capital, Kiev, on Monday, November 15, 2004, between the first and second rounds of the presidential elections. Due to allegations of voter fraud following the second round, an unprecedented third round was held, and Yushchenko eventually took office in January 2005.

Very few studies have examined the composition of governments in mixed democracies. The most recent study, though, comes from Amorim Neto and Strøm (2006). They argue that, although the government formation process varies across mixed democracies, it is perhaps appropriate to think that both the president and the prime minister have *de facto* vetoes over cabinet appointments. Thus, the president is not as strong as he would be in a presidential regime and the prime minister is not as strong as she would be in a parliamentary regime. This suggests that we might expect mixed democracies to possess both parliamentary and presidential characteristics when it comes to the composition of cabinets. An implication of this is that cabinets in mixed democracies should

be characterized by fewer partisan ministers and a lower proportionality in the allocation of portfolios than in parliamentary regimes but more partisan ministers and a higher proportionality in the allocation of portfolios than in presidential regimes. In fact, this is precisely what Amorim Neto and Strøm find in their study of twelve parliamentary and twelve mixed democracies in Europe during the 1990s. As with presidential democracies, we would expect there to be variation in cabinet partisanship and proportionality across different mixed democracies. For example, when the president's party controls a legislative majority, we should expect cabinets in a mixed democracy to look more like those commonly found in a presidential democracy. In contrast, when the president is faced by a legislature dominated by an opposition party, we should expect cabinets in a mixed democracy to look more like those commonly found in a parliamentary democracy. The historical experience of the government formation process in France seems to bear this out (Duverger 1980).

CONCLUSION

One way to classify democracies is in terms of whether they are parliamentary, presidential, or mixed. As we have seen, whether a democracy is parliamentary, presidential, or mixed

basically depends on the relationship between three “actors”—the president, the government, and the legislature. In effect, the different institutional forms of democracy examined in this chapter represent three alternative ways to structure the relationship between the executive and legislative branches of government.

The defining feature of presidentialism is the absence of legislative responsibility—the government serves at the pleasure of the president, not the legislature. Consequently, even when members of the president’s own party call for the resignation of one of his cabinet appointees, the most the legislature can do when faced with a president who fails to heed its council by asking for the resignation of the cabinet member is to hold a *symbolic* “no confidence vote” to register its disapproval. These forms of symbolic no confidence votes are rare in presidential systems, in part because they are not binding. At the time of writing this chapter, a Democrat-led Senate in the United States had scheduled a no confidence vote to register its disapproval of the activities of the Attorney General Alberto Gonzales (*New York Times*, May 17, 2007).²⁶ Although such a measure might convey the “sense of the Senate,” any successful vote would have no legal status to compel Gonzales’s removal from the government. For example, the Senate passed a similar vote in 1950 when it determined that Secretary of State Dean Acheson was not doing enough to combat the spread of communism; despite the vote, Acheson retained his post for the remainder of the Truman administration.²⁷ The ability of a cabinet member to stay in office despite the explicit disapproval of a legislative majority demonstrates a key feature of presidential systems—a separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches.

In stark contrast, the defining feature of parliamentary systems is that the composition of the government is directly controlled by the legislature. In this chapter we have outlined the negotiations among party elites that result in the appointment of prime ministers and cabinets in parliamentary systems in some detail. The prime minister—typically the head of the largest legislative party—will, *de facto*, play a central role in the appointment of the heads of the ministries. Nevertheless, the members of the cabinet—including the prime minister herself—ultimately serve at the pleasure of the legislature in parliamentary systems. Consequently, in 1990 when the United Kingdom’s Margaret Thatcher—who had been elected prime minister three times, most recently in 1987 with a 102-seat majority for the Conservative Party—lost the support of party members in the cabinet and in the House of Commons, she stepped down, thereby avoiding a vote of no confidence that had been proposed by Neil Kinnock, the leader of the opposition Labour Party. Before a vote of no confidence occurred, Thatcher was subjected to a leadership challenge from within her own party. After Thatcher’s long-time supporter Deputy Prime Minister Sir Geoffrey Howe

26. The Democrat-led Senate eventually failed in its attempt to hold a vote of no confidence in Attorney General Alberto Gonzales. Although the vote on June 11, 2007, in the U.S. Senate was 53 to 38 in favor of holding such a vote, the Democrats did not obtain the sixty votes necessary to prevent a Republican filibuster. As a result, there was no vote of no confidence.

27. “Vote of No Consequence,” *Slate*, May 21, 2007.

resigned in frustration with her opposition to agreeing to a single European currency, Michael Heseltine (who had resigned from the cabinet four years earlier to return to the “backbench”) challenged her in a Conservative Party leadership vote. Although Thatcher managed to win more votes than Heseltine, she fell short of the supermajority needed under Conservative Party rules to prevent a second-round election. She agreed to step down before the second ballot, which was eventually won by John Major.

Although the intricacies of party leadership elections vary from country to country and from party to party, this dramatic episode highlights important characteristics of parliamentary systems. Ministers serve at the pleasure of the legislature. Shifts in opinion or circumstances in the legislature can remove the head of government—oftentimes without recourse to the voting public. Margaret Thatcher was elected to the House of Commons as a representative of a London suburb and was elevated to the head of the government by a vote of her fellow Conservative members of Parliament. Eleven years later a similar vote, in which she garnered support from 204 of the 362 valid votes cast by Conservative members of Parliament, led to her removal from the position of prime minister. For students familiar with the working of the United States government, a simple (but fairly accurate) way to think about parliamentary government is to imagine a U.S. government in which the Speaker of the House, rather than the president, is the head of government.

Mixed systems are as they sound. Cabinets can be formed and reformed by either presidential or legislative initiative. Earlier in the chapter, we described how France’s Socialist president François Mitterrand decided to dismiss the right-wing-dominated cabinet in 1981 by dissolving the legislature to which it was responsible. The ensuing election returned a Socialist majority in the National Assembly and, as a result, Mitterrand was free to appoint a Socialist, Pierre Mauroy, as prime minister. The 1986 legislative elections, however, produced a slight majority for a coalition of right-wing parties and as a consequence, the cabinet was changed to reflect the new parliamentary reality—most visibly in the form of a new right-wing prime minister—Jacques Chirac. In mixed systems, therefore, governments can be said to have two masters—the president and the legislature. Which one dictates at any given time, though, depends on the electoral fortunes of the political parties involved.

Thus, the relationship between the country’s chief executive officer (whatever his title), the cabinet, and the legislature is fundamentally different in presidential and parliamentary democracies. Some political scientists have used these differences to conclude that presidentialism is a system of governance based on the division of executive and legislative powers, whereas parliamentarism is a system based on the fusion of these powers. There is, indeed, a good deal of truth in Stepan and Skach’s (1993) assertion that the essence of parliamentarism is “mutual dependence” and that the essence of presidentialism is “mutual independence.” In Chapter 15, we will examine the strategic dynamic between the executive and legislative branches in more detail when we explore how the decision to adopt parliamentary or presidential systems of government affects the survival of democracy.

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PROBLEMS

The problems that follow address some of the more important concepts and ideas introduced in this chapter.

Classifying Democracies

1. In this chapter, we discussed the rules for classifying democracies as parliamentary, presidential, or mixed. Look at the information from the following constitutions and decide whether these democracies are parliamentary, presidential, or mixed. Explain your decision.
 - a. 1919 Weimar Constitution in Germany
 - Article 25: The Reich president has the right to dissolve the Reichstag, but only once for the same reason. New elections are held no later than sixty days after the dissolution.
 - Article 53: The Reich chancellor, and, at his request, the Reich ministers, are appointed and dismissed by the Reich President.
 - Article 54: The Reich chancellor and the Reich ministers, in order to exercise their mandates, require the confidence of the Reichstag. Any one of them must resign if the Reichstag votes by explicit decision to withdraw its confidence.
 - Article 55: The Reich chancellor presides over the Reich government and conducts its affairs according to the rules of procedure, to be decided upon by the Reich government and to be approved by the Reich president.

- Article 56: The Reich chancellor determines the political guidelines and is responsible for them to the Reichstag. Within these guidelines every Reich minister leads his portfolio independently and is responsible to the Reichstag.

b. 1937 Irish Constitution

- Article 12: There shall be a President of Ireland (Uachtarán na hÉireann), hereinafter called the President, who shall take precedence over all other persons in the State and who shall exercise and perform the powers and functions conferred on the President by this Constitution and by law. The President shall be elected by direct vote of the people.
- Article 13: The President shall, on the nomination of the Dáil Éireann, appoint the Taoiseach, that is, the head of the Government or Prime Minister. The president shall, on the nomination of the Taoiseach with the previous approval of Dáil Éireann, appoint the other members of the Government. The President shall, on the advice of the Taoiseach, accept the resignation or terminate the appointment of any member of the Government. Dáil Éireann shall be summoned and dissolved by the President on the advice of the Taoiseach. The President may in his absolute discretion refuse to dissolve Dáil Éireann on the advice of a Taoiseach who has ceased to retain the support of a majority in Dáil Éireann. . . . The President shall not be answerable to either House of the Oireachtas or to any court for the exercise and performance of the powers and functions of his office or for any act done or purporting to be done by him in the exercise and performance of these powers and functions.
- Article 15: The National Parliament shall be called and known, and is in this Constitution generally referred to, as the Oireachtas. The Oireachtas shall consist of the President and two Houses, viz.: a House of Representatives to be called Dáil Éireann and a Senate to be called Seanad Éireann.
- Article 28: The Government shall consist of not less than seven and not more than fifteen members who shall be appointed by the President in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution. . . . The Government shall be responsible to the Dáil Éireann. The head of the government, or Prime Minister, shall be called, and is in this Constitution referred to as, the Taoiseach.

c. 1980 Chilean Constitution

- Article 4: Chile is a democratic republic.
- Article 24: The government and administration of the State are vested in the President of the Republic, who is the Chief of the State.
- Article 25: The President of the Republic shall hold office for a term of eight years and may not be reelected for the consecutive period.
- Article 26: The President shall be elected by direct ballot, with an absolute majority of the votes validly cast.
- Article 32: The special powers vested in the President of the Republic are the following: . . . To appoint, and remove at will, Ministers of State, Undersecretaries, Intendants, Governors and Mayors appointed by him.

- Article 33: The Ministers of State are the direct and immediate collaborators of the President of the Republic in governing and administering the State.

d. 1947 Japanese Constitution

- Article 1: The Emperor shall be the symbol of the State and of the unit of the People, deriving his position from the will of the people with whom resides sovereign power.
- Article 4: The Emperor shall perform only such acts in matters of state as are provided in the Constitution and he shall not have powers related to government.
- Article 6: The Emperor shall appoint the Prime Minister as designated by the Diet.
- Article 41: The Diet shall be the highest organ of state power, and shall be the sole law-making organ of the State.
- Article 42: The Diet shall consist of two Houses, namely the House of Representatives and the House of Councillors.
- Article 65: Executive power shall be vested in the Cabinet.
- Article 66: The Cabinet shall consist of the Prime Minister, who shall be its head, and other Ministers of State, as provided for by law. The Prime Minister and other Ministers of State must be civilians. The Cabinet, in the exercise of executive power, shall be collectively responsible to the Diet.
- Article 69: If the House of Representatives passes a non-confidence resolution, or rejects a confidence resolution, the Cabinet shall resign en masse, unless the House of Representatives is dissolved within ten (10) days.

2. Canada held an early general election on January 23, 2006, after the Liberal Party's minority government was toppled in a no-confidence vote on November 28, 2005. Canada does not have an independently elected president. Based on these two pieces of information, is Canada a presidential, parliamentary, or mixed democracy? Explain your answer.

3. If a democracy has an independently (directly or indirectly) elected president, then we automatically consider it to be a presidential democracy. True or false?

Institutions

4. A constructive vote of no confidence is essentially a vote of no confidence and an investiture vote rolled into one. What does this mean?
5. Which of the following statements best describe a vote of confidence?
 - a. A new government must pass a vote (on the cabinet's composition and proposed policies) in the legislature before it can take office.
 - b. A government declares that a vote on a particular piece of legislation is also a vote on support for the government itself; if the legislators do not support the legislation, then the government will resign (and new elections might result).
 - c. A group of legislators propose a vote on support for the incumbent government. If the government passes the vote, then it stays in office. If it fails the vote, then it must resign (and new elections might result).

6. The March 2007 "unity" or "grand coalition" cabinet of the Palestinian Territories has twelve Hamas members and six Fatah members (The other seven members are nonpartisan or from much smaller parties). Of the legislative seats controlled by the government parties, Hamas controls about 59 percent. Hamas received 48 percent of the government positions. Is this a good example of Gamson's Law? Explain.

Government Formation

7. A story in the *International Herald Tribune* from 2006 stated the following: "Dutch political parties began the complicated task of forming a new government on Thursday, one day after national elections thrust the Netherlands into the same kind of inconclusive terrain that Austria and Germany experienced in their votes. Austria has yet to form a government after its election two months ago, and in Germany last year, it took six weeks of grueling negotiations to form a coalition government under Angela Merkel." How would you explain what this means to a roommate or family member who has no idea what a parliamentary government is? Your explanation should include what the government is, how it forms, what factors affect how long this formation process takes, and who gets into government, and so on.

8. Legislative elections were held in Finland on March 18, 2007. Eight parties won seats in parliament. Based on what you have learned in this chapter and the information in Table 11.16, the leader of which party is likely to be appointed formateur? Explain.

TABLE 11.16 Legislative Election Results in Finland, 2007

Party	Seats	
	(no.)	(%)
Centre Party	51	25.5
National Coalition Party	50	25.0
Social Democratic Party	45	22.5
Left Alliance	17	8.5
Green League	15	7.5
Christian Democrats	7	3.5
Swedish People's Party	9	4.5
True Finns	5	2.5
Other	1 ^a	0.5
Total	200	100

^aProvince of Åland representative.

9. Legislative elections were held in Sweden on September 17, 2006, and seven parties won seats. Although the left-wing Social Democratic Party won more seats than any other party, the leader of the largest right-wing party was appointed to be the first formateur. Which of the following statements might explain this choice?

- The choice of formateur is random. As a result, the leader of the largest right-wing party had the same chance of being chosen as did each of the other party leaders.
- In this particular election, four right-wing parties ran as a preelectoral coalition and together won a majority of the seats. Because they had pledged to govern together if successful, it made sense to give the leader of the largest coalition party the position of formateur.
- The position of formateur is always offered first to a party on the right; if the first attempt to form a government fails, the second formateur will be chosen from a left-wing party, and so on.

10. In Table 11.17, we show the results from the 1996 legislative elections in Ecuador.

TABLE 11.17

Legislative Election Results in Ecuador, 1996

Party	Seats (no.)	Seats (%)
Social Christian Party (PSC)	28	34.1
Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE)	19	23.2
Popular Democracy (DP)	12	14.6
New Country Movement	8	9.6
Democratic Left (ID)	4	4.9
Alfarist Radical Front (FRA)	3	3.7
Ecuadorian Popular Revolutionary Action (APRE)	2	2.4
Democratic Popular Movement (MPD)	2	2.4
Ecuadorian Conservative Party (PCE)	2	2.4
Concentration of Popular Forces (CFP)	1	1.2
Independents	1	1.2
Total	82	100

- Based on the results in Table 11.17, from which party would you expect the formateur to come if Ecuador were a parliamentary democracy?
- Ecuador is in fact a presidential democracy. In the 1996 presidential elections, Abdalá Bucaram Ortíz of the Ecuadorian Roldosista Party (PRE) was elected president ahead of Jaime Nebot Saadi of the Social Christian Party (PSC). Based on this new information, from which party would you now expect the formateur to come? Why is this?

11. A new government took office on October 6, 2006, in Sweden. A couple of weeks later, two ministers in the government (in charge of commerce and culture, respectively) had to resign as a result of revelations in the press regarding personal financial improprieties. Because two cabinet ministers had changed, would most political scientists consider that the government had ended?

Government Types

12. Look back at the information about the 2006 Finnish elections in Table 11.16. Based on the information in this table, indicate at least five of the possible minimal winning coalitions that could form. What is the least minimal winning coalition out of this set of five MWC?

13. In Table 11.18, we show the results from the 2002 legislative elections in Germany. Answer the following questions.

TABLE 11.18 **Legislative Election Results in Germany, 2002**

Party	Seats	Ideology
Party of Democratic Socialism	2	Most left
Greens	55	
Social Democratic Party	251	
Christian Democratic Party	248	
Free Democratic Party	47	Most right
Total	603	

a. If a government formed between the Christian Democratic Party and the Free Democratic Party, what type of government would it be?

b. If a government formed between the Social Democratic Party and the Greens, what type of government would it be?

c. If a government formed between the Social Democratic Party, the Greens, and the Party of Democratic Socialism, what type of government would it be?

14. Minority governments are more likely to form in parliamentary democracies when opposition parties have a significant role in the policymaking process. True or false? Explain your answer.

15. Explain why minority governments should be more frequent on average in presidential democracies than parliamentary ones.