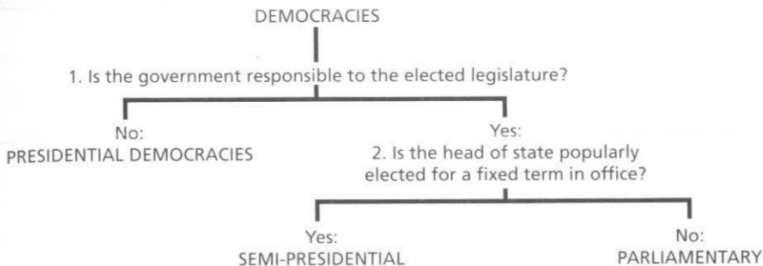# Democratic Government

Political Science 225
North Dakota State University

## Classifying Democracies

- Presidential (e.g. USA, Brazil, Afghanistan)
- Parliamentary (e.g. UK, India, Iraq)
- Hybrid / Semi-presidential (e.g. France, Haiti, Kenya)

## Parliamentary Government

1. Citizens elect representatives to a single legislature
2. The members of the legislature select a government to manage executive
   - Prime minister heads cabinet and state
   - Cabinet secretaries direct executive branches
3. The government stays in power until the next mandated election, it dissolves the parliament, or it loses a (constructive) vote of (no) confidence

# Presidential Government

## Presidential Government

- The chief executive is popularly elected
- Legislative and executive terms are fixed, not contingent on mutual confidence
- Executive chooses cabinet
- (Executive has some formal lawmaking powers)

## Semi-presidential Government

- Both the legislature and chief executive are popularly elected
- Cabinet chosen by president but responsible to legislature
- President has formal powers and is not simply a figurehead

# Pros and Cons of Parliamentary Government

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- Some party systems lead to unstable coalition dynamics
- It can be difficult for voters to assign responsibility to individuals or parties in coalition governments
- It can be difficult for citizens to punish leaders for bad policy

Pro:

## Pros and Cons of Presidential Government

Pro:

- Accountability
  - Punishing leaders is easier than in parliamentary systems
  - Retrospective voting
- Identifiability
  - Voters can predict likely government
  - Prospective voting
- Mutual checks
  - Legislators can vote on policy without worrying about dissolution
  - Representatives are forced to form custom coalitions for each piece of legislation
  - Checks can protect minority interests
- Arbiter role

Con:

# Pros and Cons of Presidential Government

Con:

- Temporal rigidity
  - Lack of dissolution reduces options in crisis
  - Lame ducks
- Majoritarianism
  - Homogeneous cabinet
  - Focus on winning presidential elections
  - False mandate
  - Coattails reduce legislative representativeness
- Dual legitimacy
  - Reduced incentives to build lasting coalitions
  - Disconnect between executive expectations and power
  - Split government can result in gridlock

## Parliamentary Democracy

- Prime minister
- Cabinet
- Portfolio
- Ministerial responsibility
- Collective cabinet responsibility

## Government Formation in Parliamentary Systems

Example: Germany 1987

**Table 12.3**    **German Legislative Elections in 1987**

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

Notes: Data are from Adam Carr's webpage at http://psephos.adam-carr.net/.

# Government Formation in Parliamentary Systems

Example: Germany 1987

| Table 12.4 | Potential West German Governments in 1987 | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Party | Seats | Percentage | Surplus seats |
| CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP | 497 | 100 | 248 |
| CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens | 451 | 90.7 | 202 |
| CDU/CSU + SPD + FDP | 455 | 91.5 | 206 |
| CDU/CSU + FDP + Greens | 311 | 62.6 | 62 |
| SPD + FDP + Greens | 274 | 55.1 | 25 |
| CDU/CSU + SPD | 409 | 82.2 | 160 |
| CDU/CSU + FDP | 269 | 54.1 | 20 |
| CDU/CSU + Greens | 265 | 53.3 | 16 |
| SPD + FDP | 232 | 46.7 | -17 |
| SPD + Greens | 228 | 45.9 | -21 |
| FDP + Greens | 88 | 17.7 | -161 |
| SPD | 186 | 37.4 | -63 |
| CDU/CSU | 223 | 44.9 | -26 |
| Greens | 42 | 8.5 | -207 |
| FDP | 46 | 9.3 | -203 |

Note: "Surplus seats" indicate the number of seats controlled by each potential government that were not required for obtaining a legislative majority.

# Government Formation in Parliamentary Systems

- Formateur
- Informateur
- Investiture
- Caretaker government

# Government Formation in Parliamentary Systems

Example: Germany 1987

| Table 12.5 | Remaining Potential West German Governments in 1987 | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Party | | Seats | Percentage | Surplus seats |
| CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens + FDP | | 497 | 100 | 248 |
| CDU/CSU + SPD + Greens | | 451 | 90.7 | 202 |
| CDU/CSU + SPD + FDP | | 455 | 91.5 | 206 |
| CDU/CSU + FDP + Greens | | 311 | 62.6 | 62 |
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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."

# Theories of Coalition Formation

### Definition

A coaltion formation game is the process by which parties bargain with each other over the distribution of cabinet portfolios—prime minister, foreign minster, etc—and eventually form a government

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  - Assume politicians are only interested in office benefits (policy-blind)
  - Parties in government can distribute more office benefits to their members than opposition parties
- Policy-seeking theories
  - Politicians are interested in policy outcomes
  - Typically assume spatial policy preferences in one or more dimensions

When thinking about coalition formation, we can think of parties in terms of two components:

- Weight: the number of seats the party holds in the legislature
- Ideal point: the party's preferred policy in one or more dimensions

## Pure Office-Seeking Theories

Assumptions:

- Parties behave like individual actors
- Parties in government receive some fixed office benefit
- Parties do not care about policy outcomes, just office

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Example (101 seat legislature):

| Party | A | B | C | D |
|-------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
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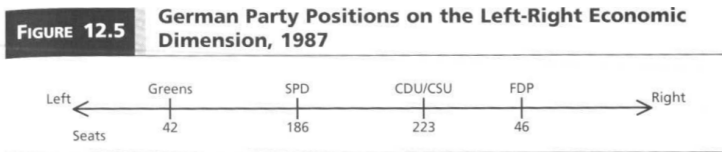
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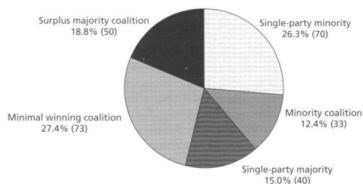
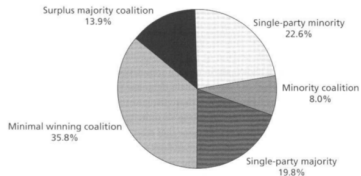Implications:

Connected coalitions



**FIGURE 12.5** German Party Positions on the Left-Right Economic Dimension, 1987

| Left | Greens | SPD | CDU/CSU | FDP | Right |
|------|--------|-----|---------|-----|-------|
| Seats | 42 | 186 | 223 | 46 | |

# Types of Governments



FIGURE 12.6 Government Types in Eleven Western European Parliamentary Democracies, 1945–1998

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

Surplus majority coalition
18.8% (50)

Single-party minority
26.3% (70)

Minimal winning coalition
27.4% (73)

Minority coalition
12.4% (33)

Single-party majority
15.0% (40)

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

Surplus majority coalition
13.9%

Single-party minority
22.6%

Minority coalition
8.0%

Minimal winning coalition
35.8%

Single-party majority
19.8%

# Why Minority Governments?

- Opposition strength
- Corporatism
- Investiture
- Strong party

# Why Minority Governments?

**Table 12.7** — Testing Theories of Minority Governments in Parliamentary Democracies

Dependent Variable: Did a Minority Government Form? 1 = Yes, 0 = No

| Variables | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Opposition strength | 0.31*** (0.06) | | | | 0.34*** (0.10) |
| Corporatism | | 0.78*** (0.25) | | | 0.93*** (0.34) |
| Investiture vote | | | −0.89*** (0.18) | | −1.08*** (0.36) |
| Strong party | | | | −0.54** (0.33) | −0.23 (0.33) |
| Constant | −1.65*** (0.30) | −2.73*** (0.89) | 0.44*** (0.14) | 0.34* (0.18) | −4.38*** (1.44) |
| Observations | 219 | 101 | 219 | 142 | 81 |
| Log likelihood | −131.26 | −64.10 | −138.69 | −95.43 | −35.17 |

*Source:* Data are from the Comparative Parliamentary Democracy (CPD) project (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

# Government Duration



**FIGURE 12.7** Average Parliamentary Government Duration by Cabinet Type, 1945–1998 (days)
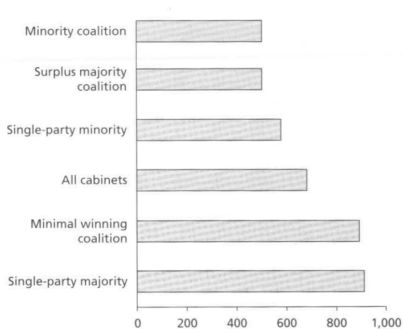
Source: Data are from the Comparative Parliamentary Democracy (CPD) project (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).

Note: Data cover eleven Western European parliamentary democracies.

# Government Duration

| Table 12.9 | Number of Governments That Fell for Technical and Discretionary Reasons in Eleven Western European Parliamentary Democracies, 1945–1998 | |
|---|---|---|

| | Specific reason | No. |
|---|---|---|
| Technical | | |
| | Constitutionally mandated election | 73 |
| | Other constitutional reason | 21 |
| | Death of PM | 6 |
| Discretionary | | |
| | Early election | 64 |
| | Enlargement of government | 13 |
| | Parliamentary defeat | 31 |
| | Intercoalition conflict over policy | 53 |
| | Intercoalition conflict not related to policy | 16 |
| | Intraparty conflict | 39 |
| Technical | | 99 |
| Discretionary | | 156 |
| Total | | 255 |

*Source:* Data are from the Comparative Parliamentary Democracy (CPD) project (Müller and Strøm 2000; Strøm, Müller, and Bergman 2003).