

# BAK10: Comparative Democratic Politics

Week 5 - Executives

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# The Plan for Today

- **Executive forms:** how do we distinguish between presidentialism, semi-presidentialism, parliamentarism, and what difference does it make?
- How variation in executive form may matter for the functioning and survival of democracy.

# Branches of Government

- **Executive:** Government, Cabinet, PM, President. Function: implementing laws, directing the civil service, setting the policy agenda.
- **Legislative:** Parliament, Congress, National Assembly, Diet etc. Function: representing the people, making laws, holding the executive to account.
- **Judiciary:** ordinary courts, constitutional courts, supreme court. Function: interpreting and applying the law, upholding the constitution.

# Comparing Executives

“The President is elected from the people by one process, and the House of Representatives by another. The **independence of the legislative and executive powers** is the specific quality of the **Presidential Government**, just as the **fusion and combination** is the precise principle of **Cabinet Government**.” (Bagehot, *The English Constitution* 1867)



# Some Definitions

In **parliamentary democracies**, executive authority, consisting of a prime minister and cabinet, arises out of the legislature. **The executive is at all times, subject to a vote of no confidence by a majority.**



**ITALY'S NEW GOVERNMENT**  
PM CONTE'S CABINET WINS CONFIDENCE VOTE IN PARLIAMENT



Mariano Rajoy was one of Europe's longest-serving leaders. After losing a confidence vote, he told lawmakers he had left Spain "better off than I had found it." Francisco Seco/Associated Press



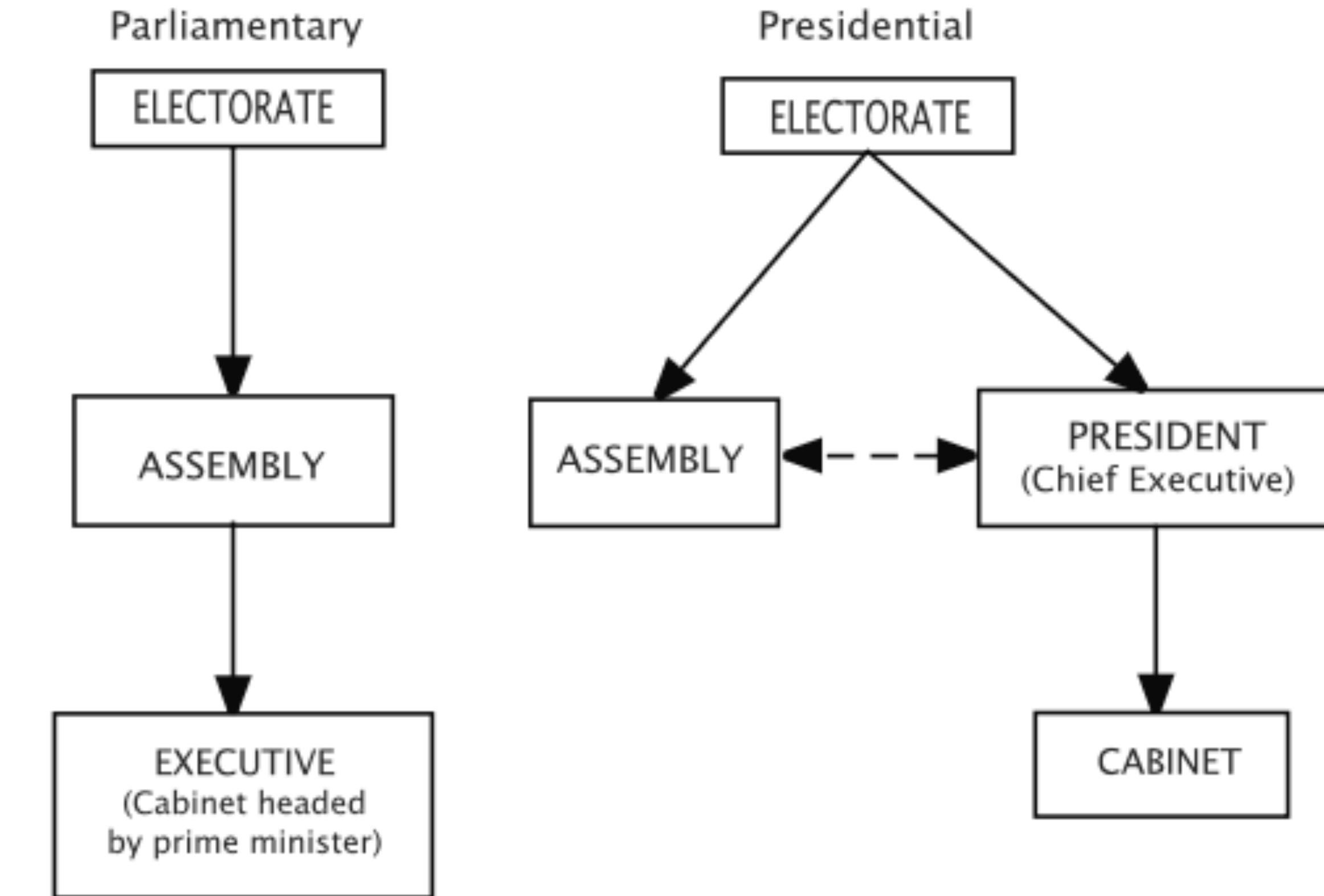
# Some Definitions

In **presidential systems** the executive is headed by a **popularly elected president** who serves as the chief executive. The terms of the executive and the legislature are fixed and are not subject to mutual confidence. **The president names and directs the cabinet.**



# Hierarchical vs Transactional

- Power ‘fusion’ in parliamentary system: hierarchical relationship between the executive and the legislature.
- Dual legitimacy in presidential systems: transactional relationship between the executive and the legislature.

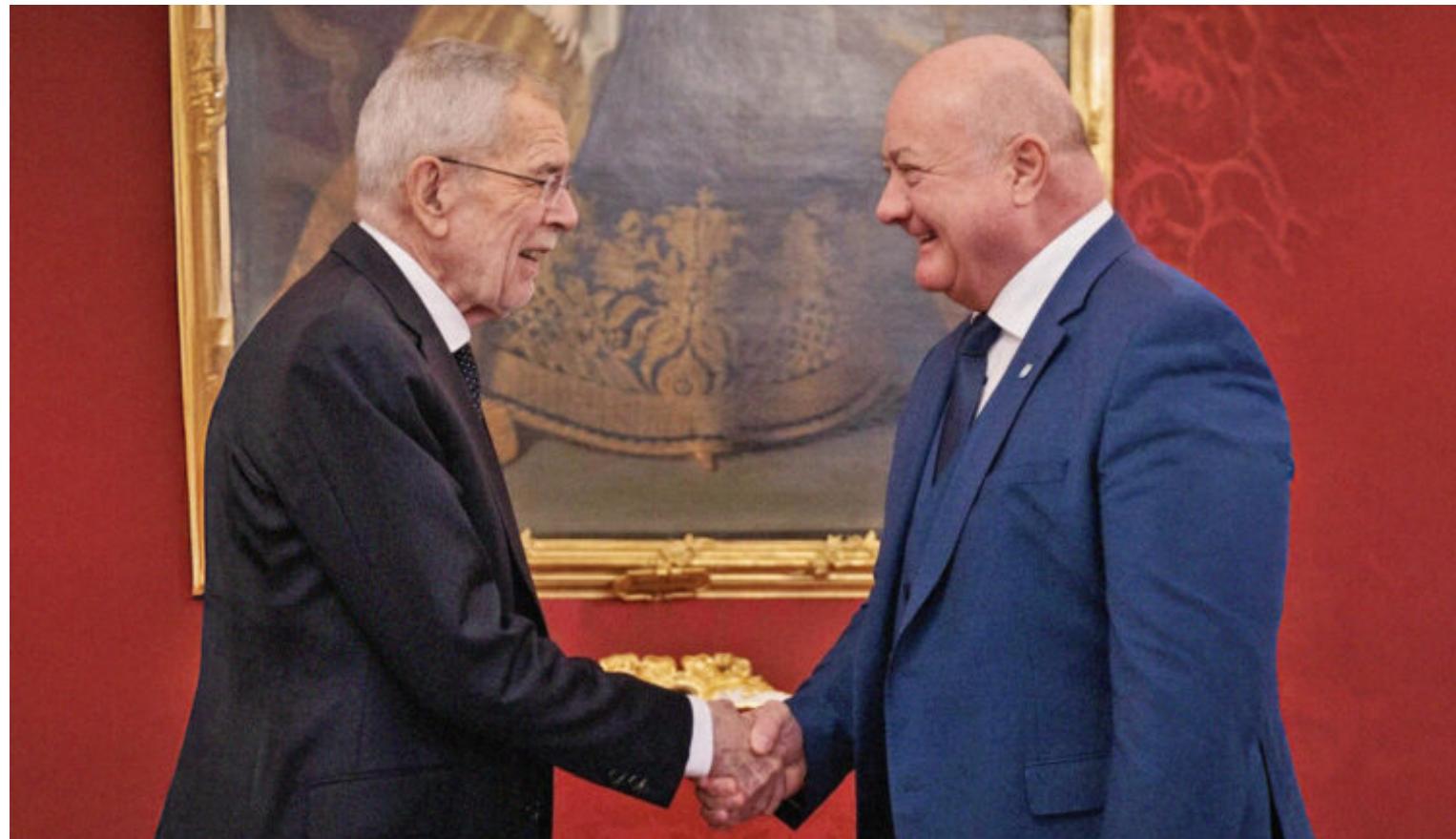


Solid lines indicate hierarchical relationship, with arrow indicating selection of agent by principal.

Dashed lines with two-headed arrows indicate transactional relationship.

# More Definitions

In **semi-presidential systems**, the **president is popularly elected** and cannot be removed by parliament. There are also a **prime minister and cabinet, who are subject to the confidence of parliament**.



# More Definitions

Two sub-types of **semi-presidentialism**:

**Premier-presidentialism**, where the prime minister and cabinet are **exclusively accountable** to the parliamentary majority.

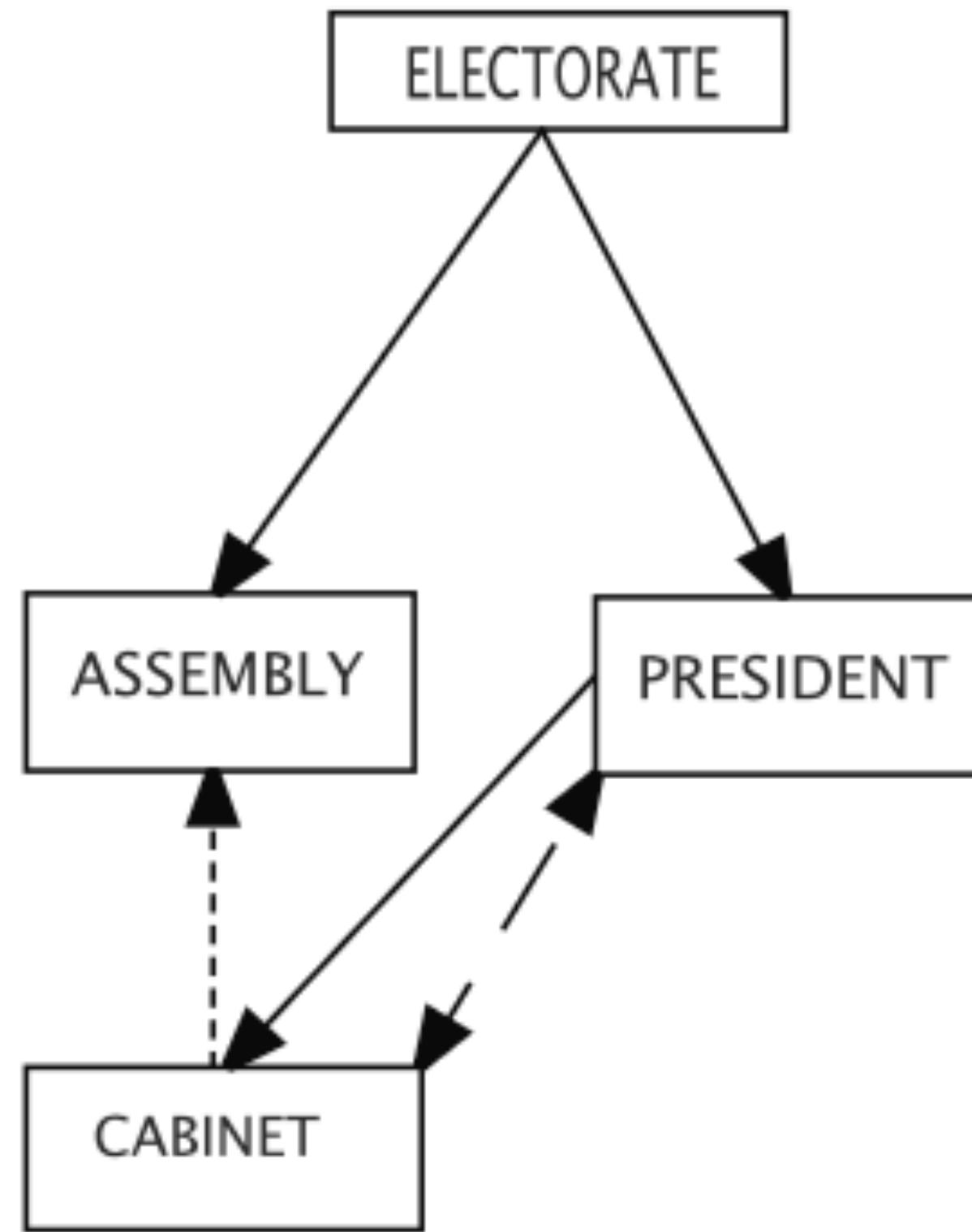


**President-parliamentarism**, where the PM and cabinet are **dually accountable** to both the president and parliamentary majority.

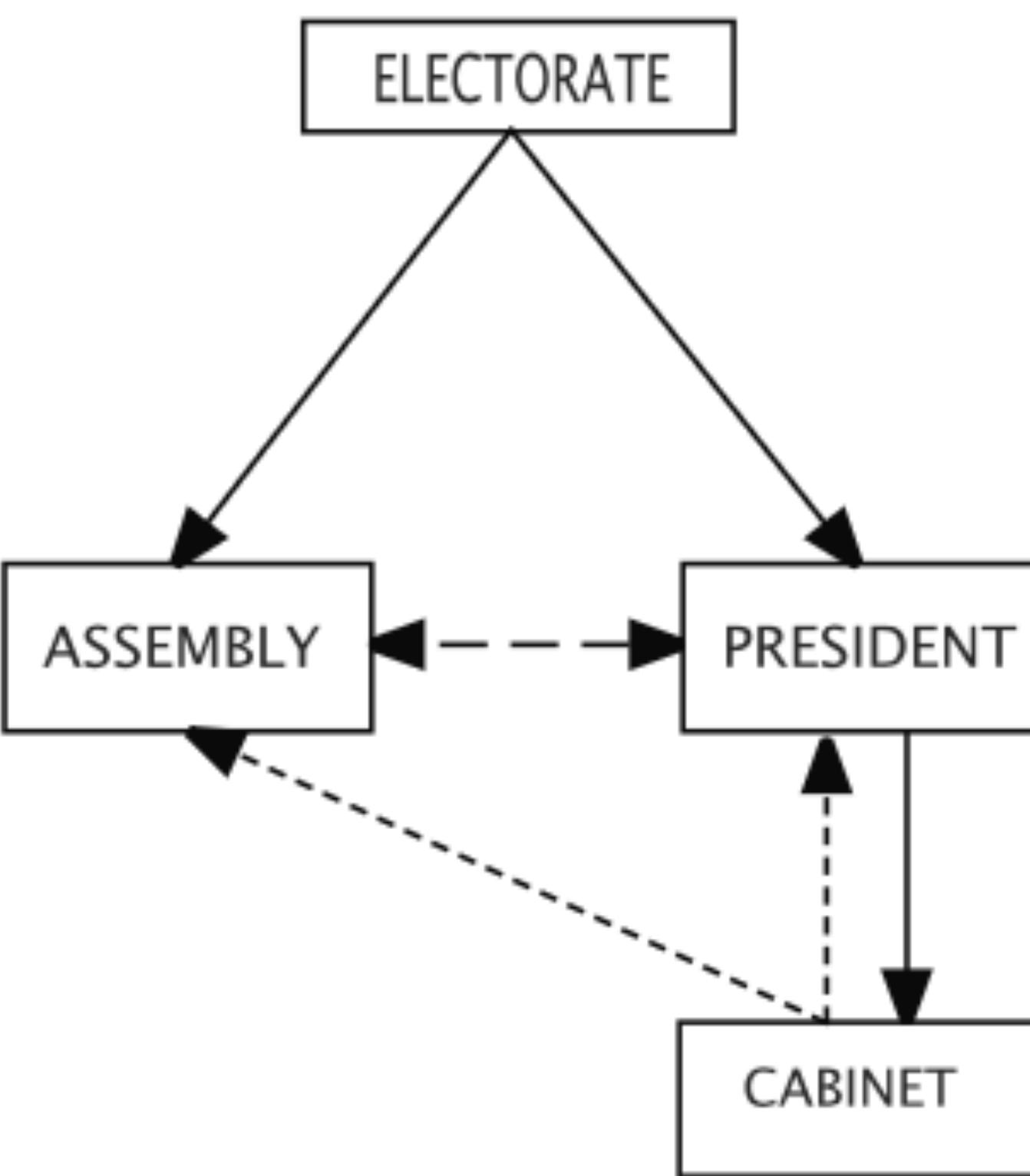


# Hierarchical and Transactional

Premier-presidential



President-parliamentary

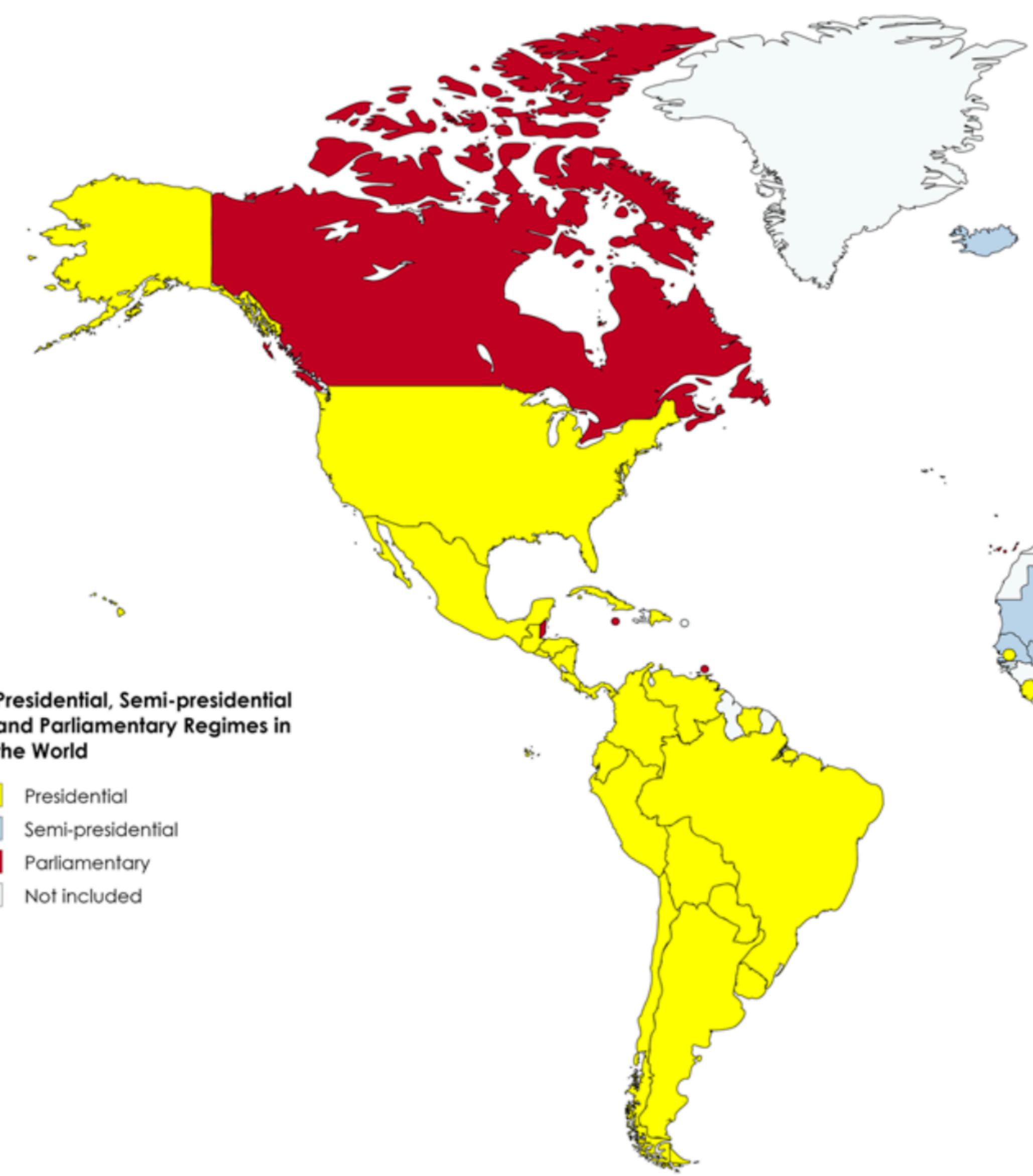


**An aside:** There are also some real-world/theoretical ‘hybrid’ systems, with different configurations of powers (more on this in week 13!)

Solid lines indicate hierarchical relationship, with arrow indicating selection of agent by principal.

Dotted lines indicate hierarchical relationship, with arrow indicating accountability of agent to principal who may terminate delegated authority.

Dashed lines with two-headed arrows indicate transactional relationship.





- Source: Samuels, D., & Shugart, M. S. (2010). Presidents, parties, and prime ministers: how the separation of powers affects party organization and behavior. *Cambridge University Press*.

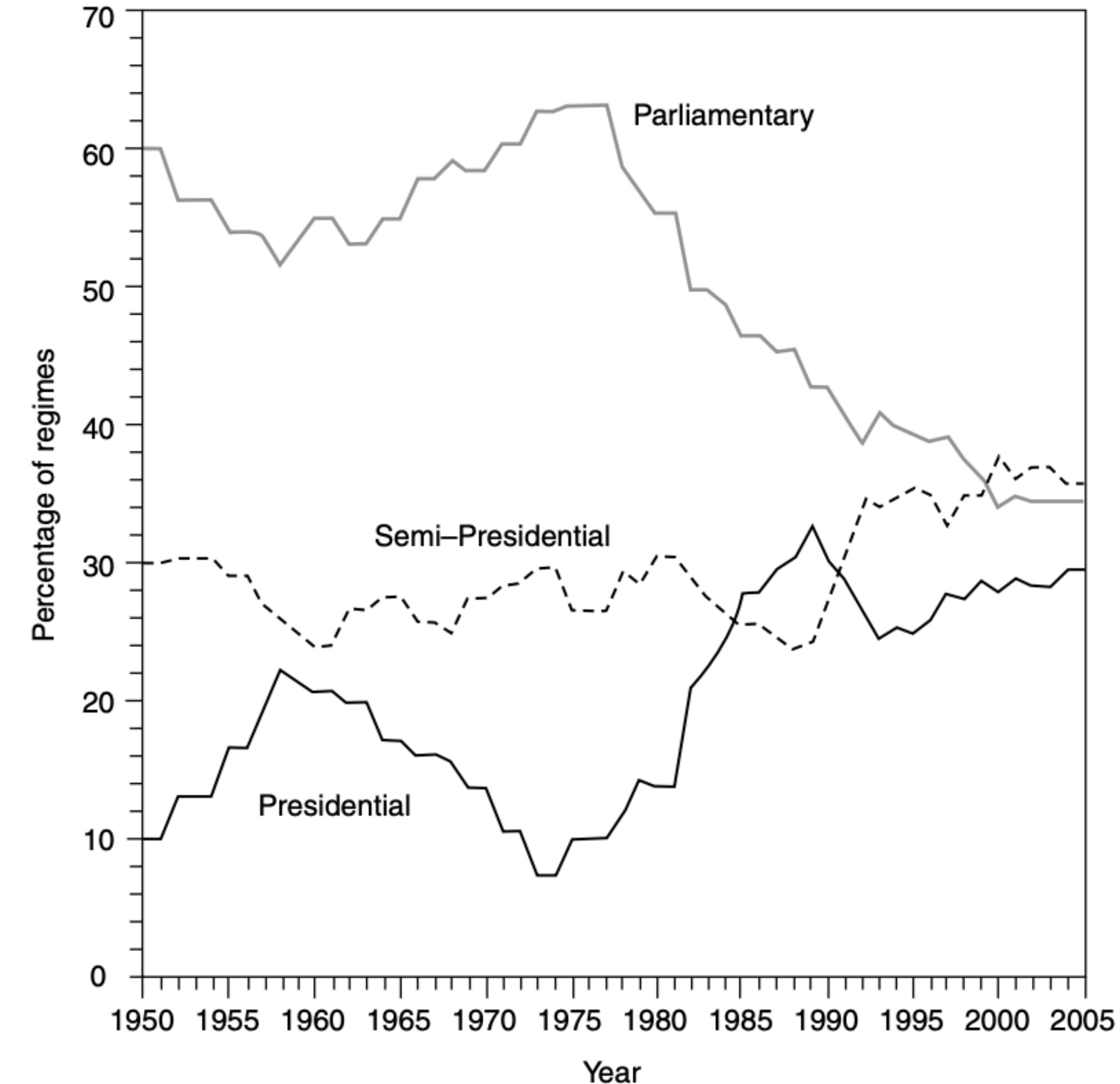
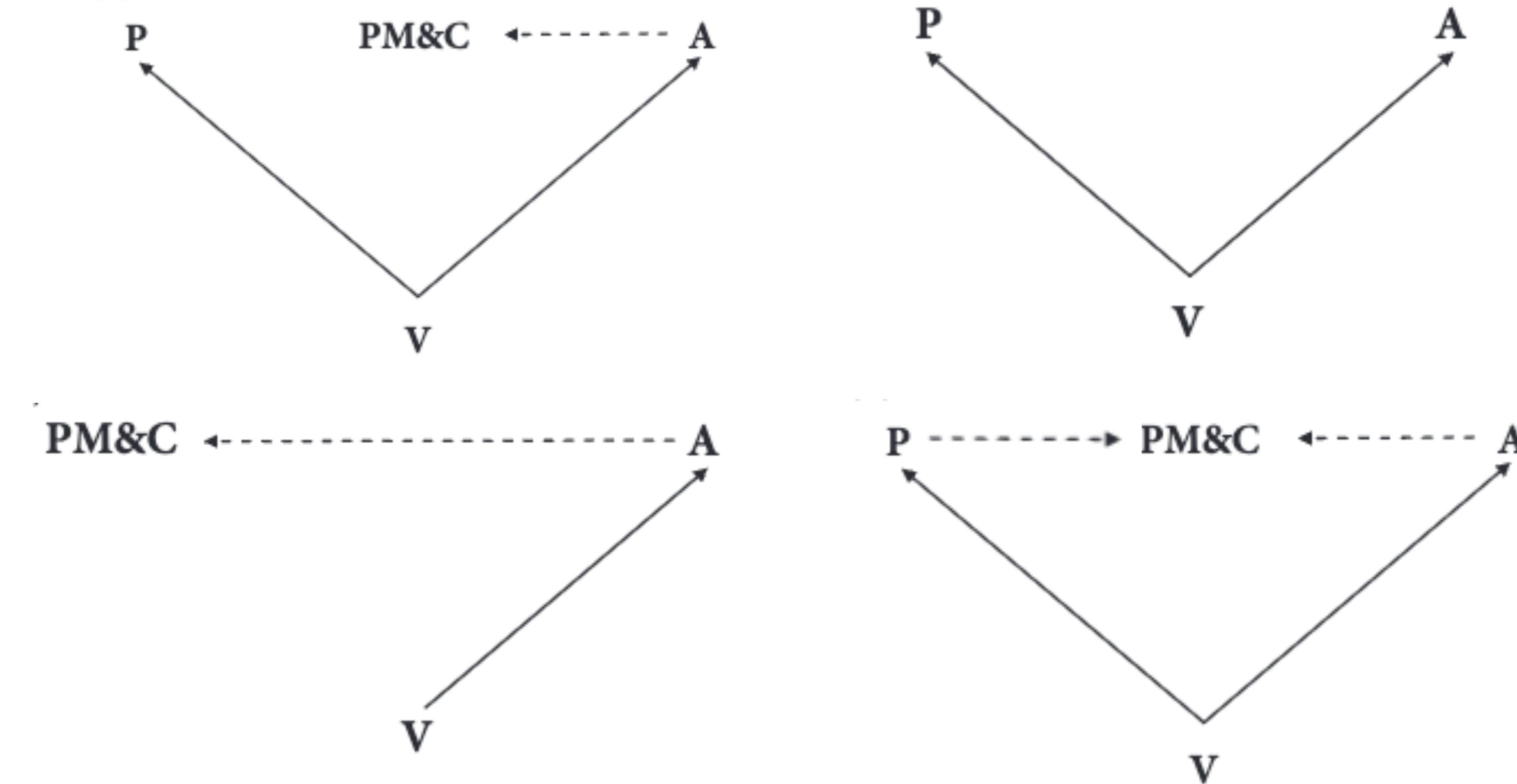


FIGURE 1.1. Percentage of Democratic Regimes by Executive–Legislative Structure, 1950–2005.

# Quick test: Which is which...?



*Notes:* V = voters, A = assembly, P = President, PM = Prime Minister, C = Cabinet,  $\rightarrow$  = election,  $\dashrightarrow$  = dismissal.

# Are these distinctions useful?

- Elgie (1998) and especially Siaroff (2003): **not much.**  
Relational, formal aspects of power distribution  
does not map onto effective powers:
  - Powers to veto and initiate legislation.
  - Power to chair cabinet meetings.
  - Discretion in appointing PM, cabinet ministers  
and other high officials.
  - Competence over domaines réservés' (EU,  
foreign policy etc.).



# Are these distinctions useful?

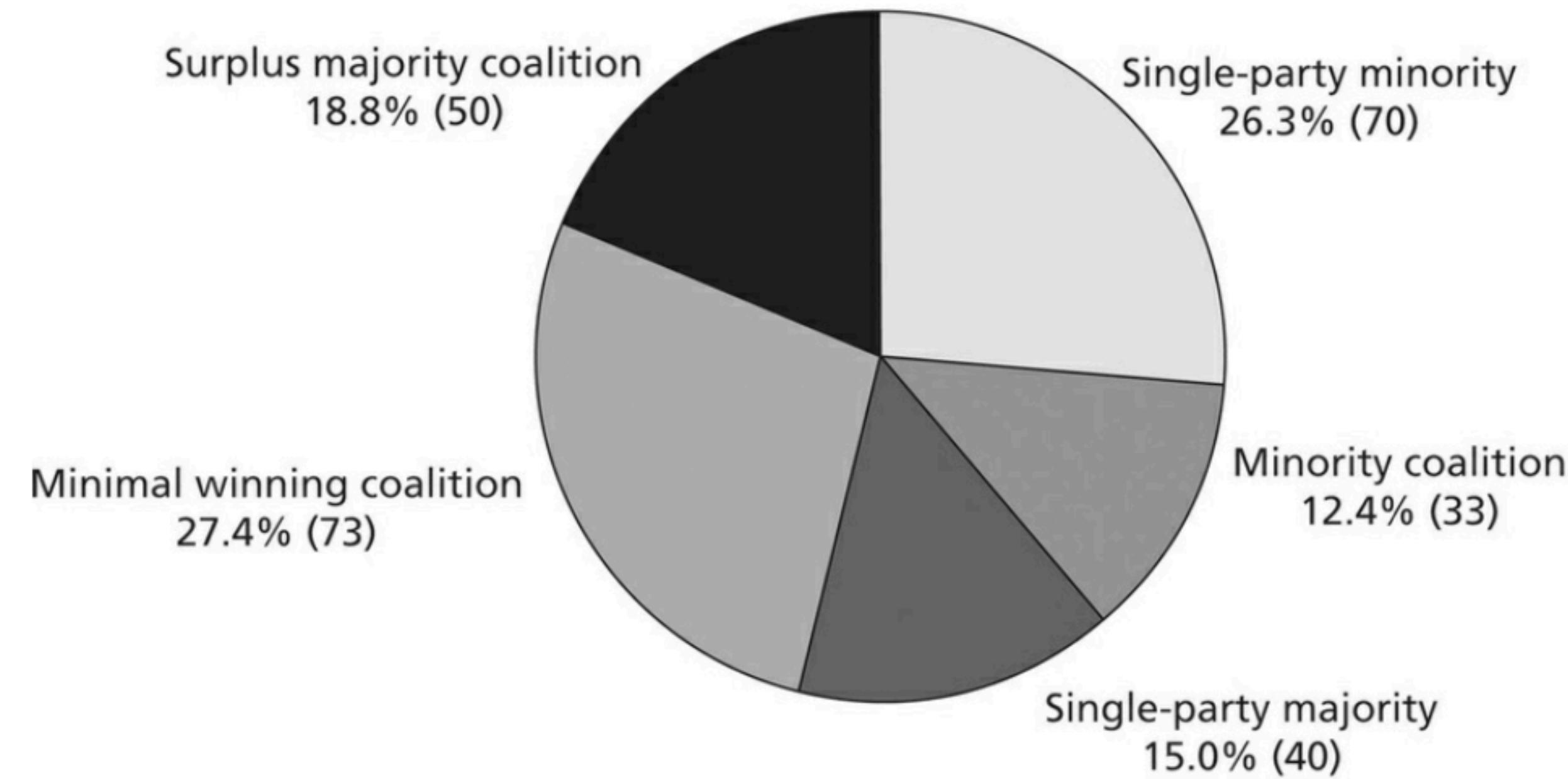
- Large variation in effective power of presidents **within categories**:
  - ‘Figurehead’ elected presidents make political practice in some premier-presidential systems akin to parliamentarism (Austria, Ireland).
  - Significant *de facto* powers of non-elected presidents (Finland pre-1988, arguably Italy) in formally parliamentary systems.
  - Forms of *hyper-presidentialism* in formally premier-presidential systems (France), via other constitutional provisions and synchronised terms.

- Three major claims:
  - Executive forms affect cabinet composition (Amorim Neto & Samuels 2010).
  - Executive forms affect party politics (Samuels & Shugart, 2010).
  - Executive forms affect democratic survival (Linz, 1990).

# Cabinet Composition

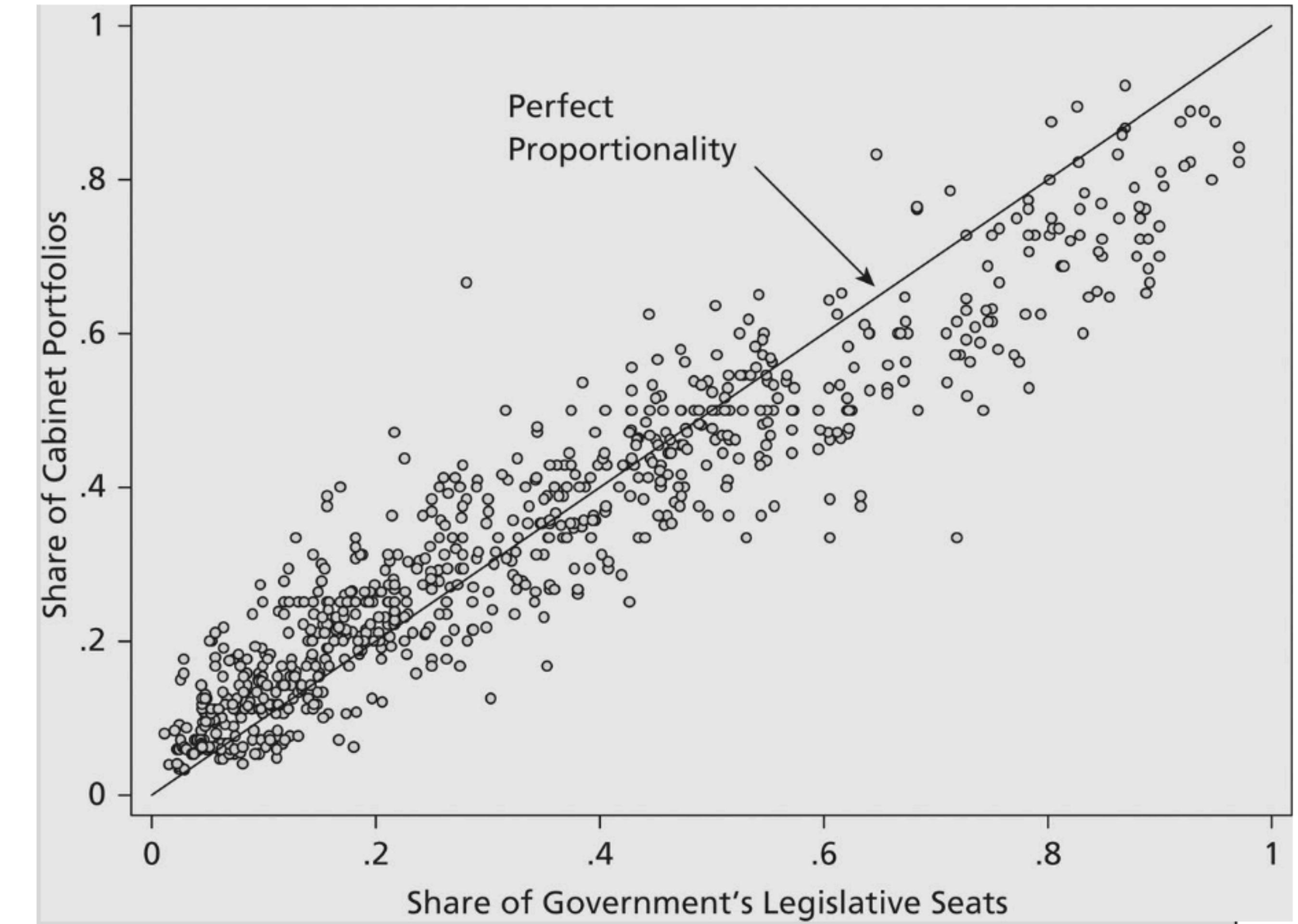
- In a parliamentary system, the PM must appoint a cabinet that enjoys an *implicit* legislative majority. Including:
- **Minority governments**, which must negotiate with a legislature where governing parties do not have a majority.
- **Surplus majority governments**, the government could lose or remove a party and still control a majority of the seats in the legislature.

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



# Cabinet Composition

- This is usually done through the allocation of cabinet **portfolios** in proportion to the number of seats each party contributes to the coalition (**Gamson's Law**).
- Responsibility of the cabinet to the legislature influences how the cabinet is put together.

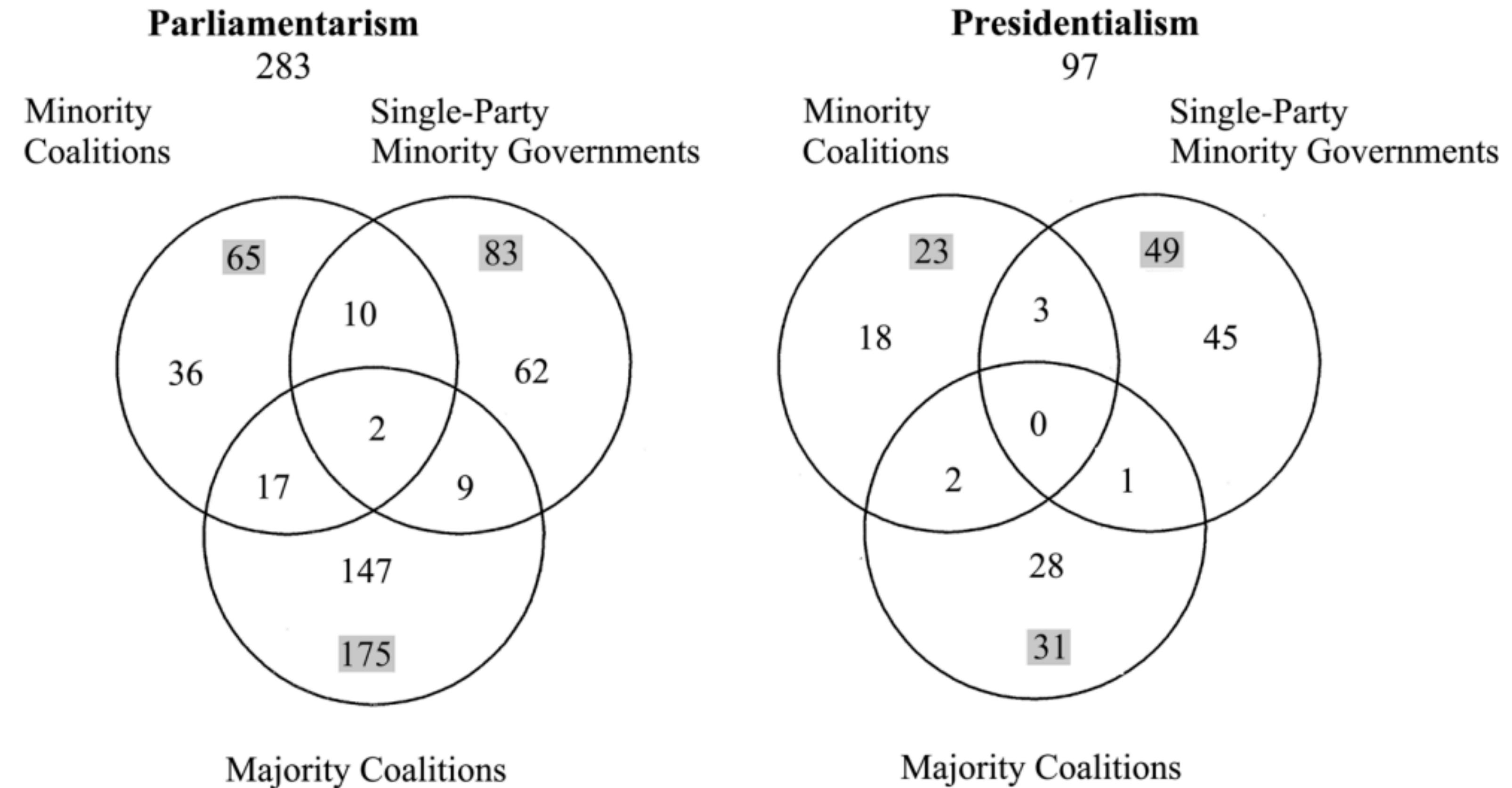


# Cabinet Composition

- **Presidents** have no constitutional imperative to form majority cabinets—they are free to form **minority** cabinets whenever they want. They're also not bound to proportional allocation of seats to other parties.
- As a result, under presidentialism (1) **coalitions** are less common, (2) even when coalitions form, portfolio apportionment is **less proportional**, (3) **non-partisan** ministers are more common, and (4) executive initiatives are more likely to fail in the legislature.

# Cabinet Composition

- (1) coalitions are less common



*Fig. 1. Distribution of coalition governments under parliamentarism and presidentialism*

# Cabinet Composition

- (2) even when coalitions form, portfolio apportionment is **less proportional**, (3) **non-partisan** ministers are more common.

**Table 3.** Average Percentage of Non-Partisan Ministers by Regime Type

Regime Type	Percentage (Std. Dev.)
Parliamentary	2.47 (4.99)
Semi-Presidential	7.21 (10.69)
Presidential	20.87 (21.47)

**Table 6.** Average Coalescence by Regime Type

Regime Type	Coalescence (Std. Dev.)
Parliamentary	.883 (.106)
Semi-Presidential	.883 (.088)
Presidential	.718 (.194)

# Cabinet Composition

- (4) executive initiatives are more likely to fail in the legislature.

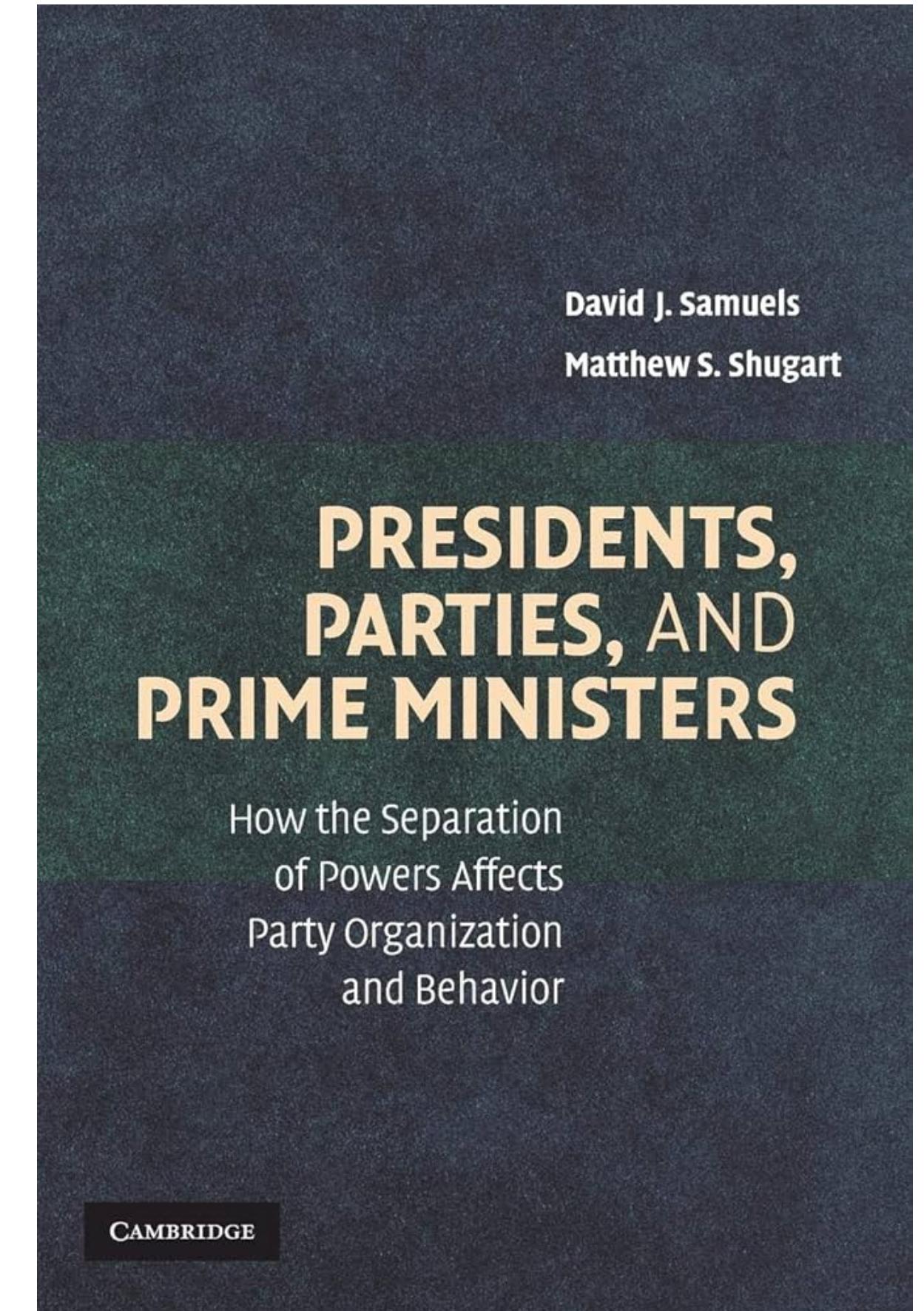
TABLE 2 *Legislative Success of the Executive*

Coalition status	Parliamentarism	Obs.	Presidentialism	Obs.
All	80.15 (13.92)	335	62.63 (20.30)	214
Single majority	89.12 (10.17)	107	71.57 (17.78)	55
Coalition majority	76.07 (10.89)	122	51.31 (19.71)	33
Coalition minority	78.25 (17.21)	26	53.03 (21.25)	20
Single minority	79.28 (8.92)	45	61.34 (17.94)	84

Notes: 'All' includes 'Super majority' and 'Divided government' situations. Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

# Party Politics

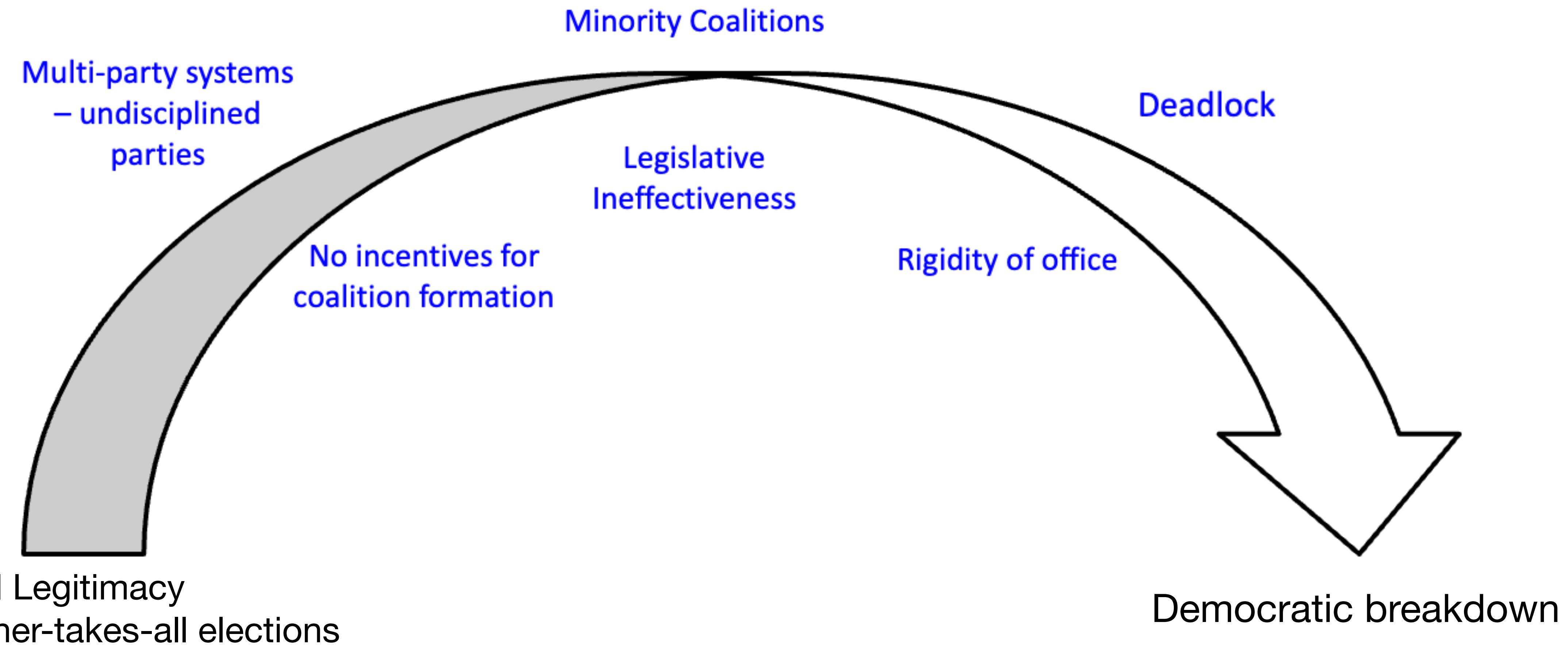
- Separation of power → different needs/incentives:
- In parliamentary systems, prime ministers and cabinet members are **agents of their party**. Legislative parties have the last word on cabinet survival, and will be judged for their decision in elections. This requires disciplined, cohesive parties.
- In presidential systems, Presidents win with support beyond their party, and claim **personal mandates**. This impedes the formation of strong party organisations.



# Party Politics

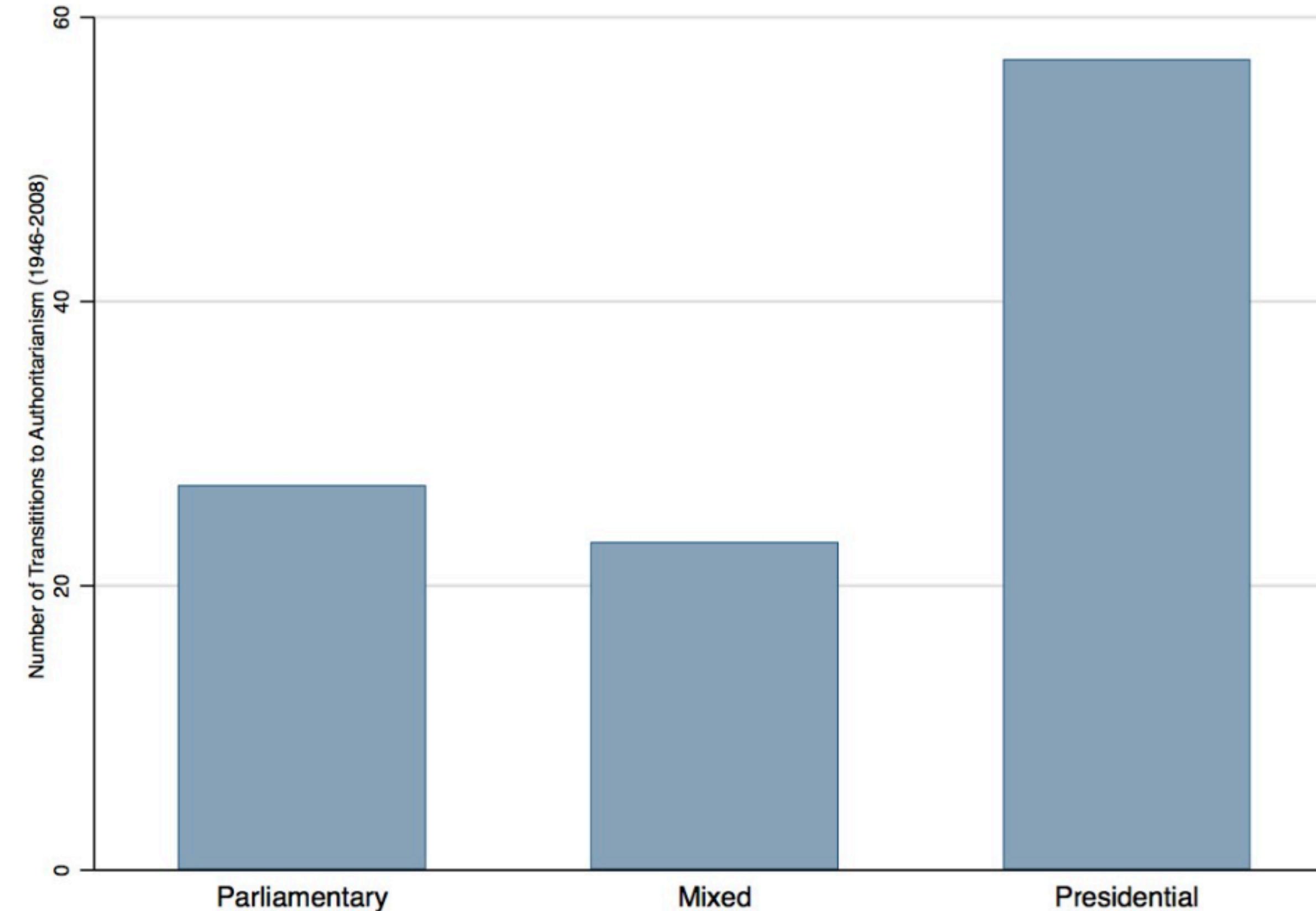
- Implications:
- “Presidentialized” parties: loose coalitions held together by a weakly accountable leader.
- Party system volatility under presidentialism.
- Weaker mandate representation under presidentialism: policy switches.







# Executive Forms and Democracy



Based on data from Cheibub, Gandhi and Vreeland 2010

- Some counterpoints:
- Empirical relationship in favour of Linz's thesis depends on the fact that most of Latin America is presidential. But democracies here are especially fragile because they emerge out of military coups (Cheibub, 2007).
- Coalitional presidencies: presidents have toolkits at their disposals to overcome the conflict-inducing nature of the separation of powers, e.g. through strategic use of legislative and budgetary prerogatives (Chaisty et al., 2014).
- Linz is right, but not for the right reasons. The problem is not *separation* of power, but the *personalisation* of power (Ganghof, 2021).

**Thank you very much for  
your kind attention!**