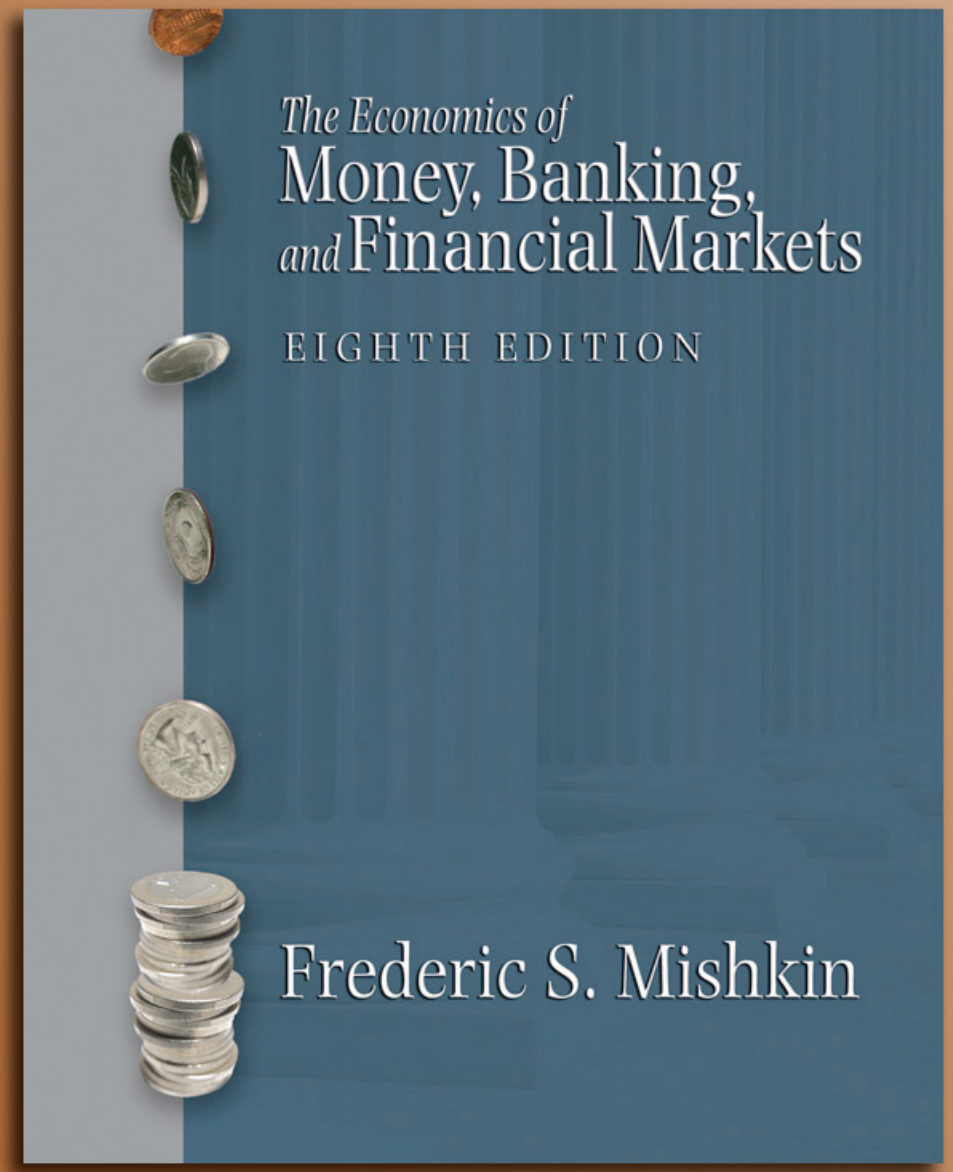

Chapter 6

The Risk and Term Structure of Interest Rates

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PEARSON Addison Wesley

Risk Structure of Interest Rates

- Default risk—occurs when the issuer of the bond is unable or unwilling to make interest payments or pay off the face value
  - U.S. T-bonds are considered default free
  - Risk premium—the spread between the interest rates on bonds with default risk and the interest rates on T-bonds
- Liquidity—the ease with which an asset can be converted into cash
- Income tax considerations

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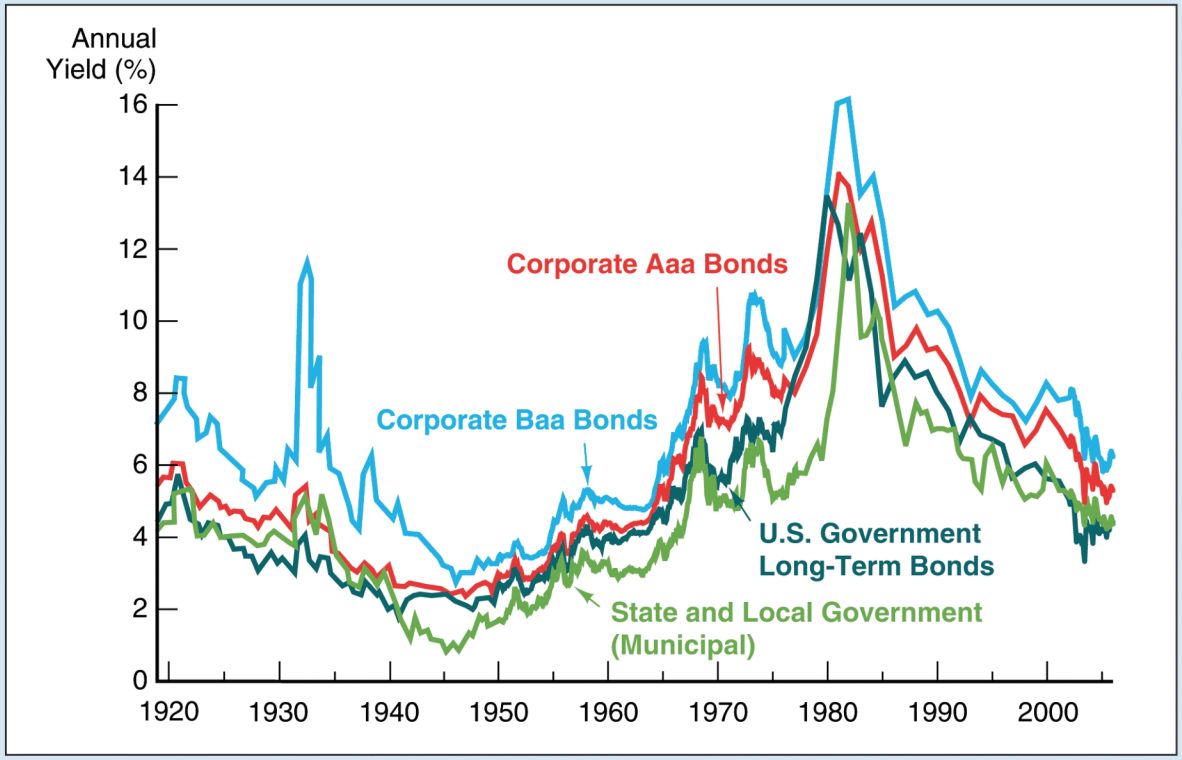
FIGURE 1

Long-Term Bond Yields, 1919–2005

Sources: Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Banking and Monetary Statistics, 1941–1970*; Federal Reserve: www.federalreserve.gov/releases/h15/data.htm.



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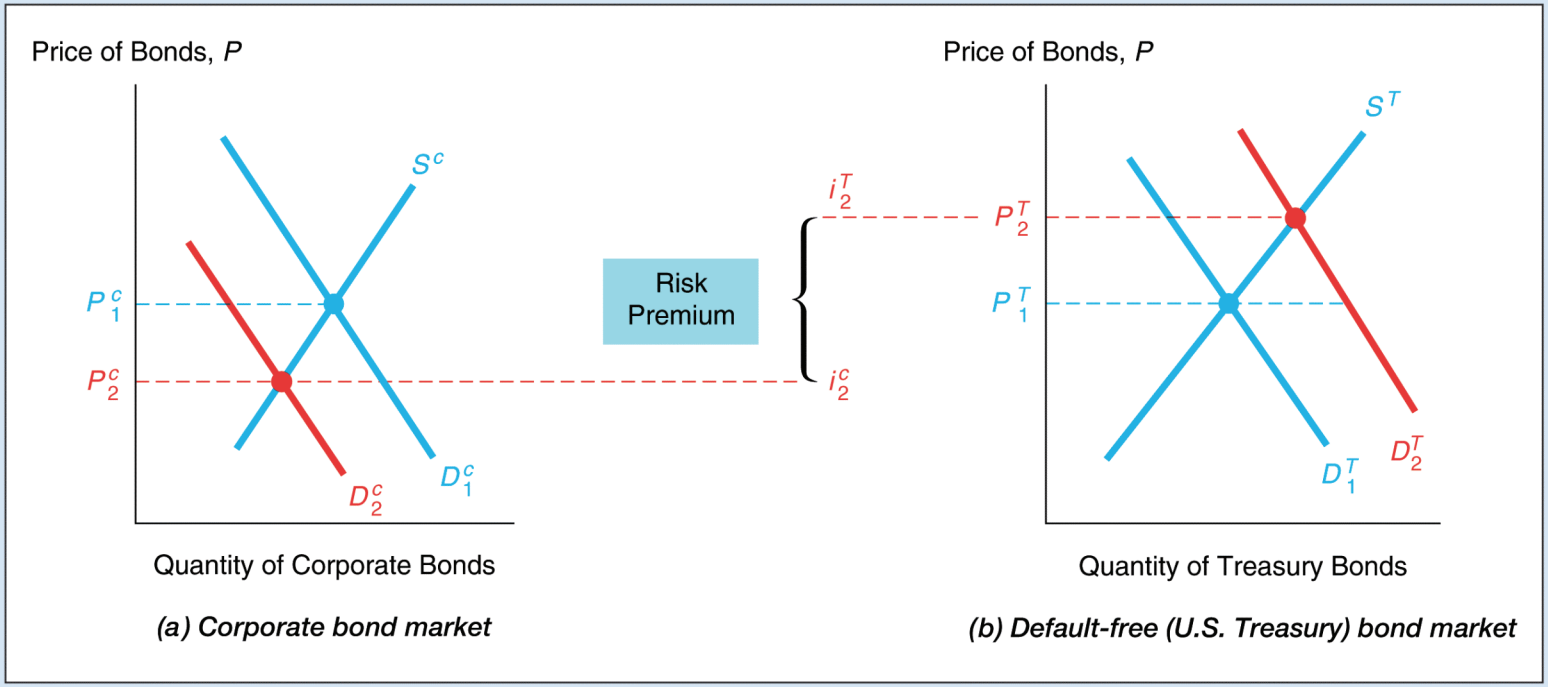

FIGURE 2 **Response to an Increase in Default Risk on Corporate Bonds**

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TABLE 1 Bond Ratings by Moody's and Standard and Poor's

Rating			
Moody's	Standard and Poor's	Descriptions	Examples of Corporations with Bonds Outstanding in 2006
Aaa	AAA	Highest quality (lowest default risk)	General Electric, Pfizer, Inc. United Parcel Service, Inc.
Aa	AA	High quality	Wal-Mart, PepsiCo, Credit Suisse First Boston
A	A	Upper medium grade	Dell, Anheuser-Busch, McDonald's, Boeing
Baa	BBB	Medium grade	Motorola, FedEx Corp., Royal Caribbean, Tommy Hilfiger
Ba	BB	Lower medium grade	Ford, Allied Waste Industries, Jack in the Box, Inc.
B	B	Speculative	Rite Aid, General Motors, Levi Strauss
Caa	CCC, CC	Poor (high default risk)	Revlon, Fedders Corp., Integrated Electrical Services, Inc.
C	D	Highly speculative	United Airlines Corp., Pliont Corp., Northwest Airlines, Corp.

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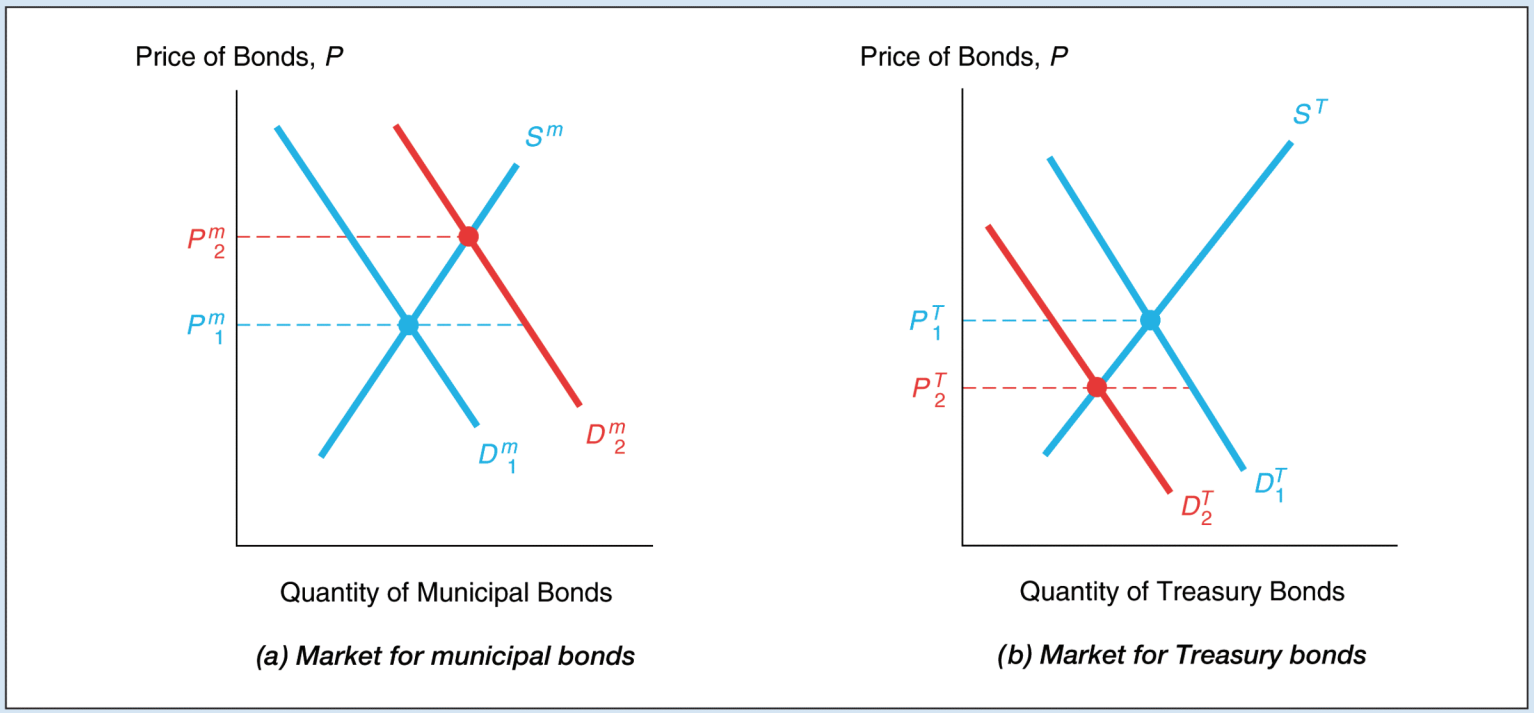

FIGURE 3 **Interest Rates on Municipal and Treasury Bonds**

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Term Structure of Interest Rates

- Bonds with identical risk, liquidity, and tax characteristics may have different interest rates because the time remaining to maturity is different
- Yield curve—a plot of the yield on bonds with differing terms to maturity but the same risk, liquidity and tax considerations
  - Upward-sloping ⇒ long-term rates are above short-term rates
  - Flat ⇒ short- and long-term rates are the same
  - Inverted ⇒ long-term rates are below short-term rates

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Facts Theory of the Term Structure of Interest Rates Must Explain

1. Interest rates on bonds of different maturities move together over time
2. When short-term interest rates are low, yield curves are more likely to have an upward slope; when short-term rates are high, yield curves are more likely to slope downward and be inverted
3. Yield curves almost always slope upward

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Three Theories to Explain the Three Facts

1. Expectations theory explains the first two facts but not the third
2. Segmented markets theory explains fact three but not the first two
3. Liquidity premium theory combines the two theories to explain all three facts

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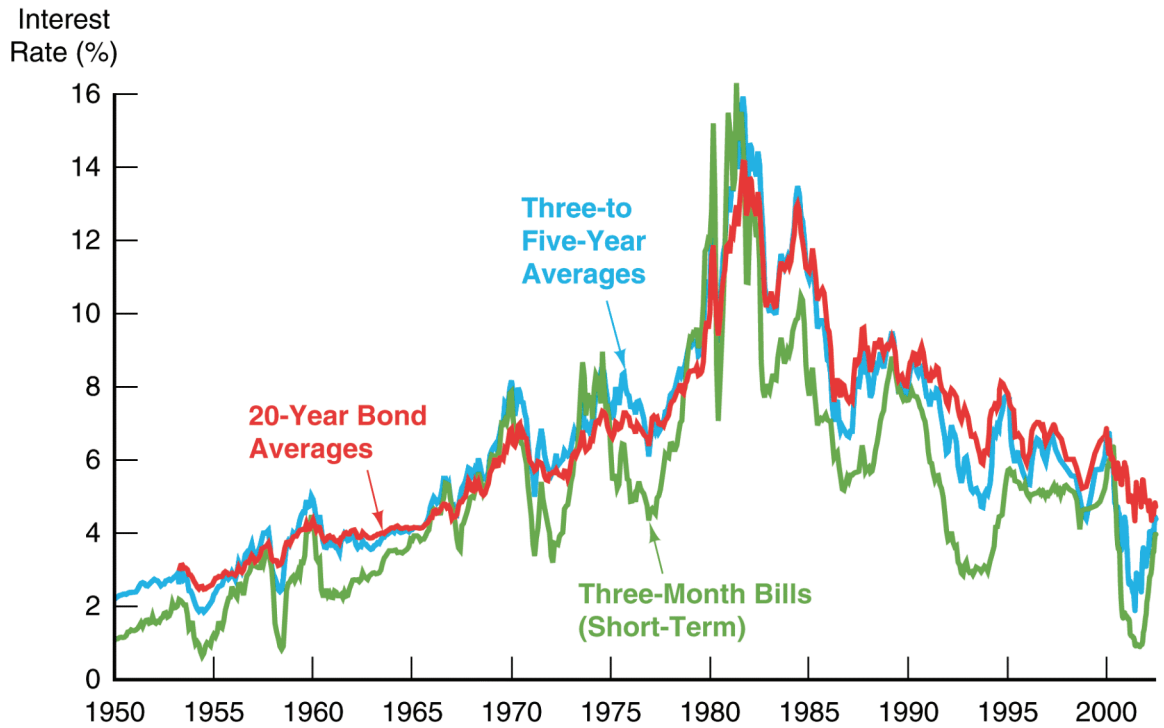

FIGURE 4 **Movements over Time of Interest Rates on U.S. Government Bonds with Different Maturities**

Sources: Federal Reserve: www.federalreserve.gov/releases/h15/data.htm.

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Expectations Theory

- The interest rate on a long-term bond will equal an average of the short-term interest rates that people expect to occur over the life of the long-term bond
- Buyers of bonds do not prefer bonds of one maturity over another; they will not hold any quantity of a bond if its expected return is less than that of another bond with a different maturity
- Bonds like these are said to be perfect substitutes

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Expectations Theory—Example

- Let the current rate on one-year bond be 6%.
- You expect the interest rate on a one-year bond to be 8% next year.
- Then the expected return for buying two one-year bonds averages (6% + 8%)/2 = 7%.
- The interest rate on a two-year bond must be 7% for you to be willing to purchase it.

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Expectations Theory—In General

For an investment of \$1

i_t = today's interest rate on a one-period bond

i^e_{t+1} = interest rate on a one-period bond expected for next period

i_{2t} = today's interest rate on the two-period bond

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Expectations Theory—In General (cont'd)

Expected return over the two periods from investing \$1 in the two-period bond and holding it for the two periods

$$(1 + i_{2t})(1 + i_{2t}) - 1$$

$$= 1 + 2i_{2t} + (i_{2t})^2 - 1$$

$$= 2i_{2t} + (i_{2t})^2$$

Since $(i_{2t})^2$ is very small

the expected return for holding the two-period bond for two periods is

$$2i_{2t}$$

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Expectations Theory—In General (cont'd)

If two one-period bonds are bought with the \$1 investment

$$(1+i_t)(1+i^e_{t+1})-1$$

$$1+i_t+i^e_{t+1}+i_t(i^e_{t+1})-1$$

$$i_t+i^e_{t+1}+i_t(i^e_{t+1})$$

$i_t(i^e_{t+1})$ is extremely small

Simplifying we get

$$i_t+i^e_{t+1}$$

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Expectations Theory—In General (cont'd)

Both bonds will be held only if the expected returns are equal

$$2i_{2t} = i_t + i^e_{t+1}$$

$$i_{2t} = \frac{i_t + i^e_{t+1}}{2}$$

The two-period rate must equal the average of the two one-period rates

For bonds with longer maturities

$$i_{nt} = \frac{i_t + i^e_{t+1} + i^e_{t+2} + \ldots + i^e_{t+(n-1)}}{n}$$

The n-period interest rate equals the average of the one-period interest rates expected to occur over the n-period life of the bond

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Expectations Theory

- Explains why the term structure of interest rates changes at different times
- Explains why interest rates on bonds with different maturities move together over time (fact 1)
- Explains why yield curves tend to slope up when short-term rates are low and slope down when short-term rates are high (fact 2)
- Cannot explain why yield curves usually slope upward (fact 3)

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Segmented Markets Theory

- Bonds of different maturities are not substitutes at all
- The interest rate for each bond with a different maturity is determined by the demand for and supply of that bond
- Investors have preferences for bonds of one maturity over another
- If investors have short desired holding periods and generally prefer bonds with shorter maturities that have less interest-rate risk, then this explains why yield curves usually slope upward (fact 3)

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Liquidity Premium & Preferred Habitat Theories

- The interest rate on a long-term bond will equal an average of short-term interest rates expected to occur over the life of the long-term bond plus a liquidity premium that responds to supply and demand conditions for that bond
- Bonds of different maturities are substitutes but not perfect substitutes

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Liquidity Premium Theory

$$i_{nt} = \frac{i_t + i^e_{t+1} + i^e_{t+2} + \ldots + i^e_{t+(n-1)}}{n} + l_{nt}$$

where l_{nt} is the liquidity premium for the n-period bond at time t

l_{nt} is always positive

Rises with the term to maturity

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Preferred Habitat Theory

- Investors have a preference for bonds of one maturity over another
- They will be willing to buy bonds of different maturities only if they earn a somewhat higher expected return
- Investors are likely to prefer short-term bonds over longer-term bonds

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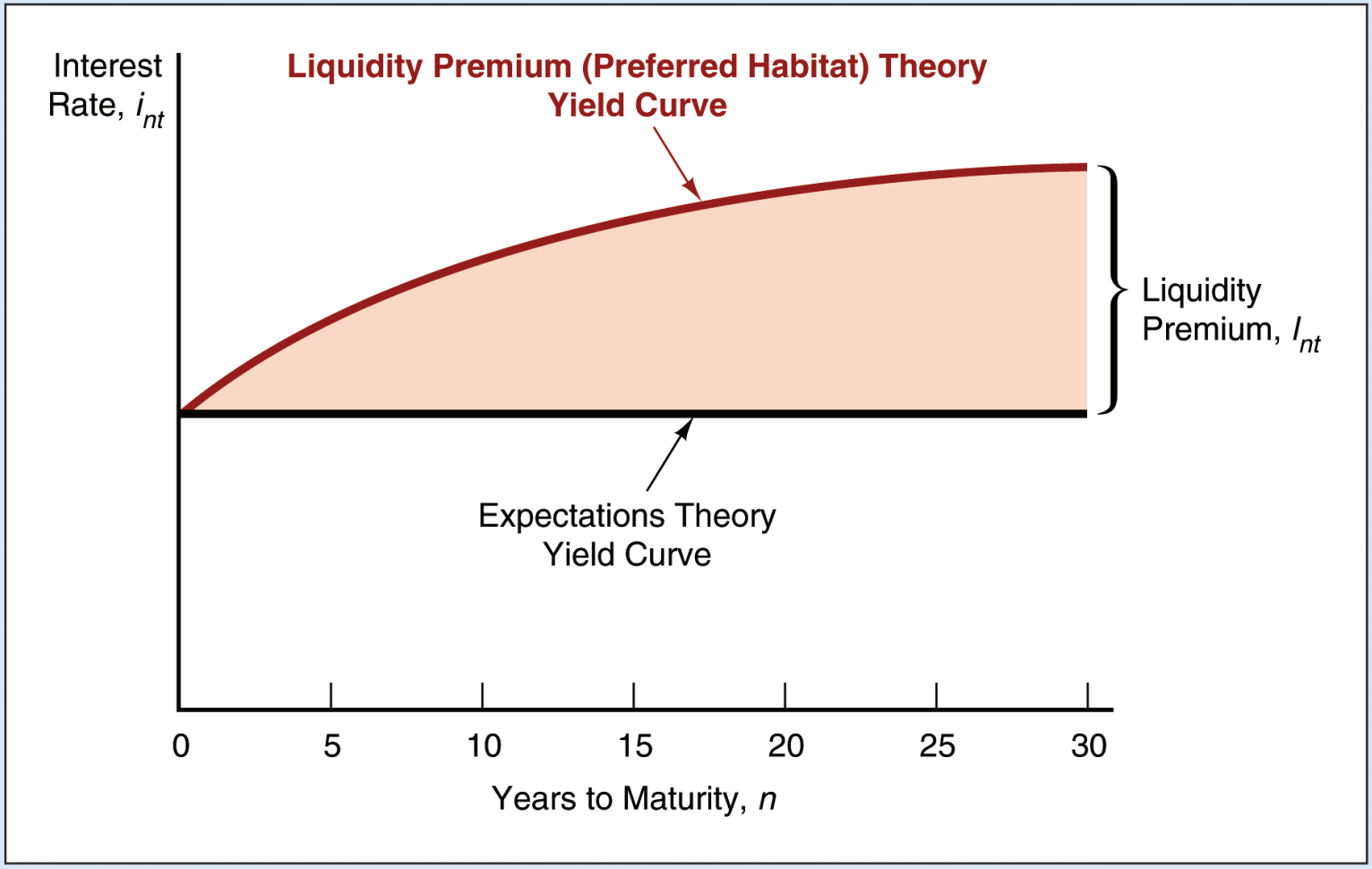

FIGURE 5 The Relationship Between the Liquidity Premium (Preferred Habitat) and Expectations Theory

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Liquidity Premium and Preferred Habitat Theories, Explanation of the Facts

- Interest rates on different maturity bonds move together over time; explained by the first term in the equation
- Yield curves tend to slope upward when short-term rates are low and to be inverted when short-term rates are high; explained by the liquidity premium term in the first case and by a low expected average in the second case
- Yield curves typically slope upward; explained by a larger liquidity premium as the term to maturity lengthens

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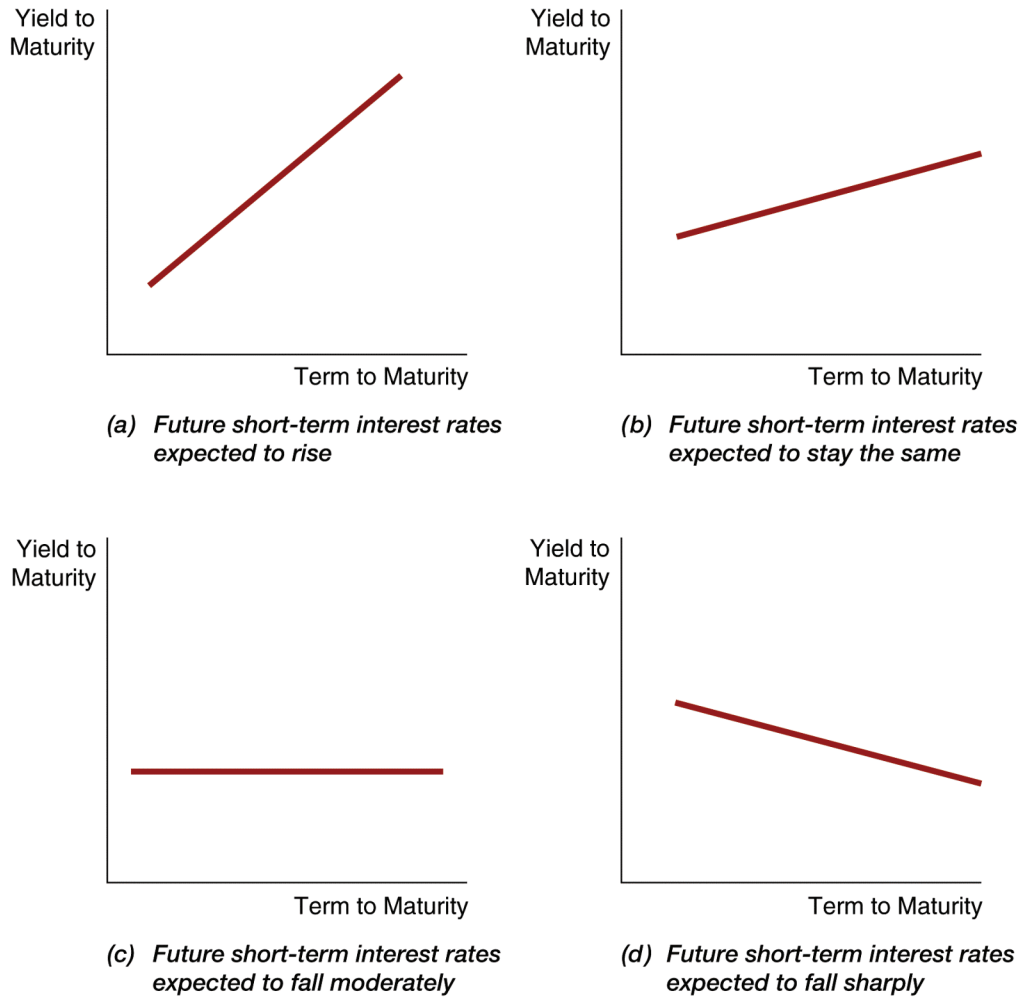

FIGURE 6 **Yield Curves and the Market's Expectations of Future Short-Term Interest Rates According to the Liquidity Premium (Preferred Habitat) Theory**

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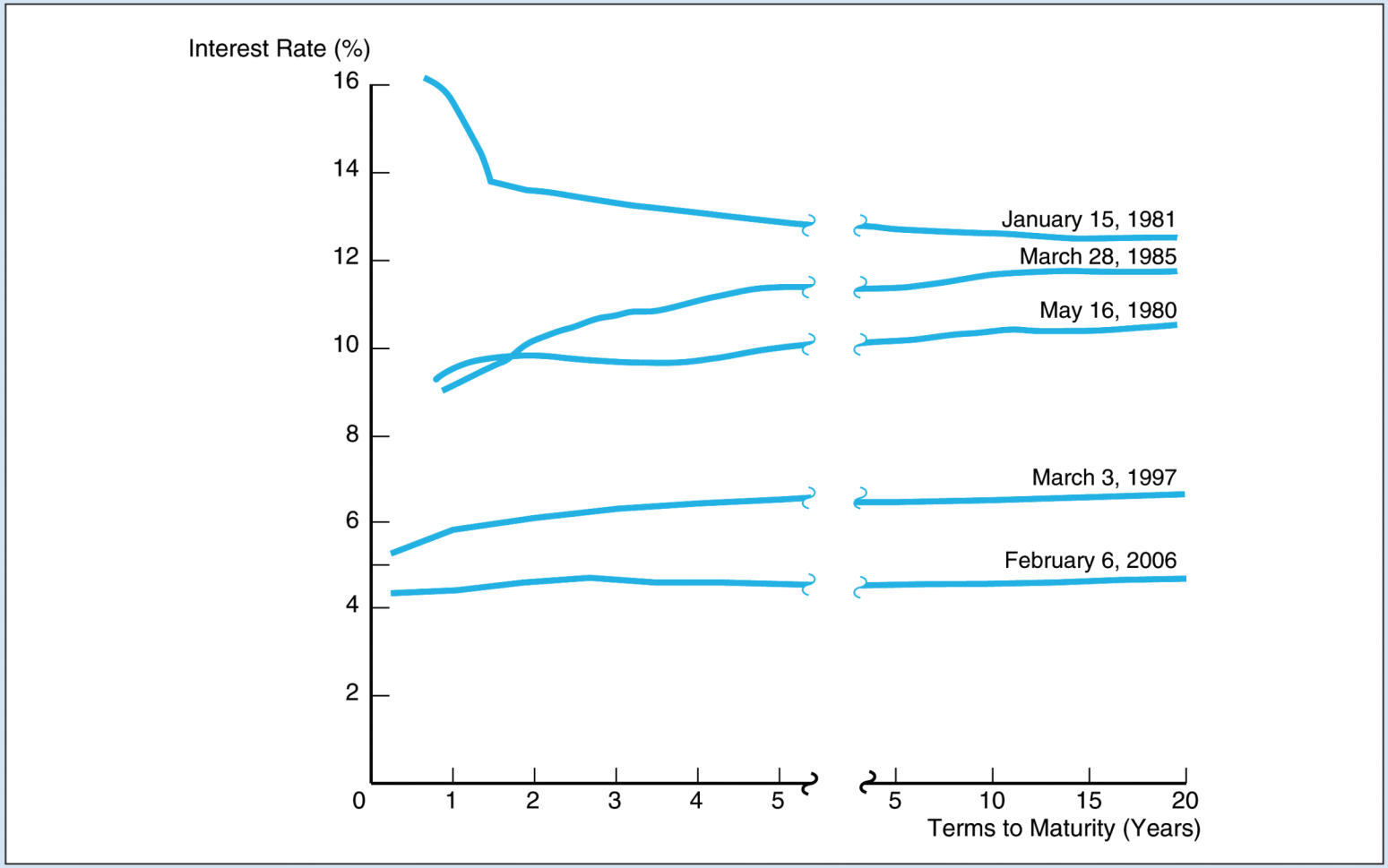

FIGURE 7 **Yield Curves for U.S. Government Bonds**

Sources: Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis; *U.S. Financial Data*, various issues; *Wall Street Journal*, various dates.

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