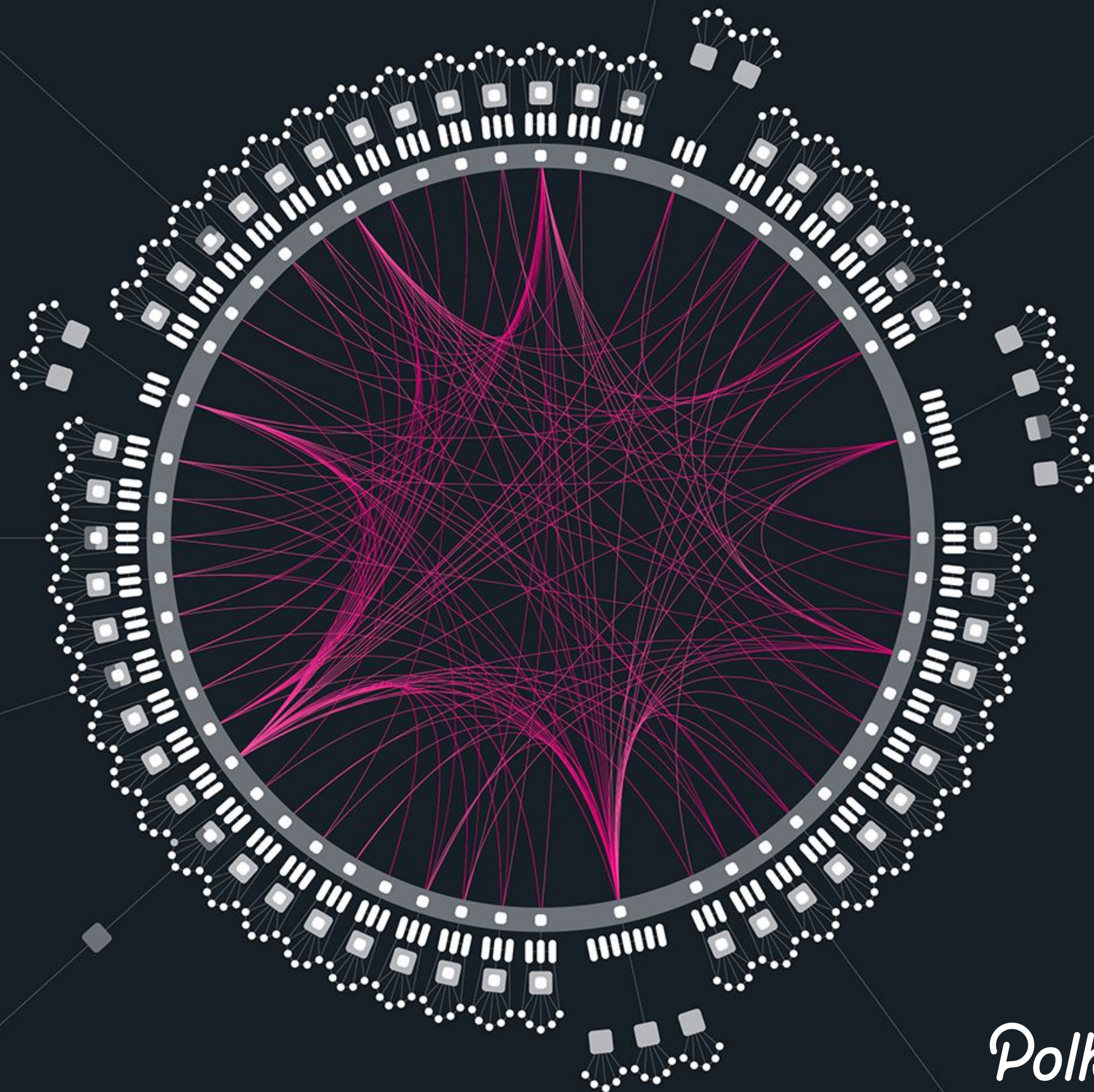


Intro to Polkadot, Part 3: Hybrid Consensus with BABE and GRANDPA

HYBRID CONSENSUS



Polkadot.

FINALITY

- Finality in classic blockchain model is probabilistic
- Other mechanisms (e.g. Tendermint) have provable finality
- BUT the big drawback is that they are vulnerable to stalling
- AND Polkadot may occasionally need to revert blocks that have been recently added (in case of conflicting information about parachains)
- ◆ This should be rare, so ideal situation is a situation where we generally have fast finalization, but block production can continue and we let finalization “catch up” when ready

Why Do We Want Provable Finality?

- Allows us to prove to parties not involved in consensus that a block is final
- Provable finality makes bridges to other blockchains easier

Hybrid Consensus

- Best of both worlds - block production can always continue as long as one validator is online
- Finalization is done via a separate finalization gadget
- In ideal circumstances, block finalization can be rather fast (a few blocks, empirically ~ 20-30 seconds)
- With minor issues, can delay finalization while further checks are done
- In the event of severe network partitioning or malicious attack, block production can continue but we temporarily fall back to probabilistic finalization

Impacts

- Polkadot messaging system speed is constrained by block production time, not time to finalize - allows faster message passing
- Allows liveness as long as one validator is producing blocks, albeit with probabilistic finality

BABE and GRANDPA

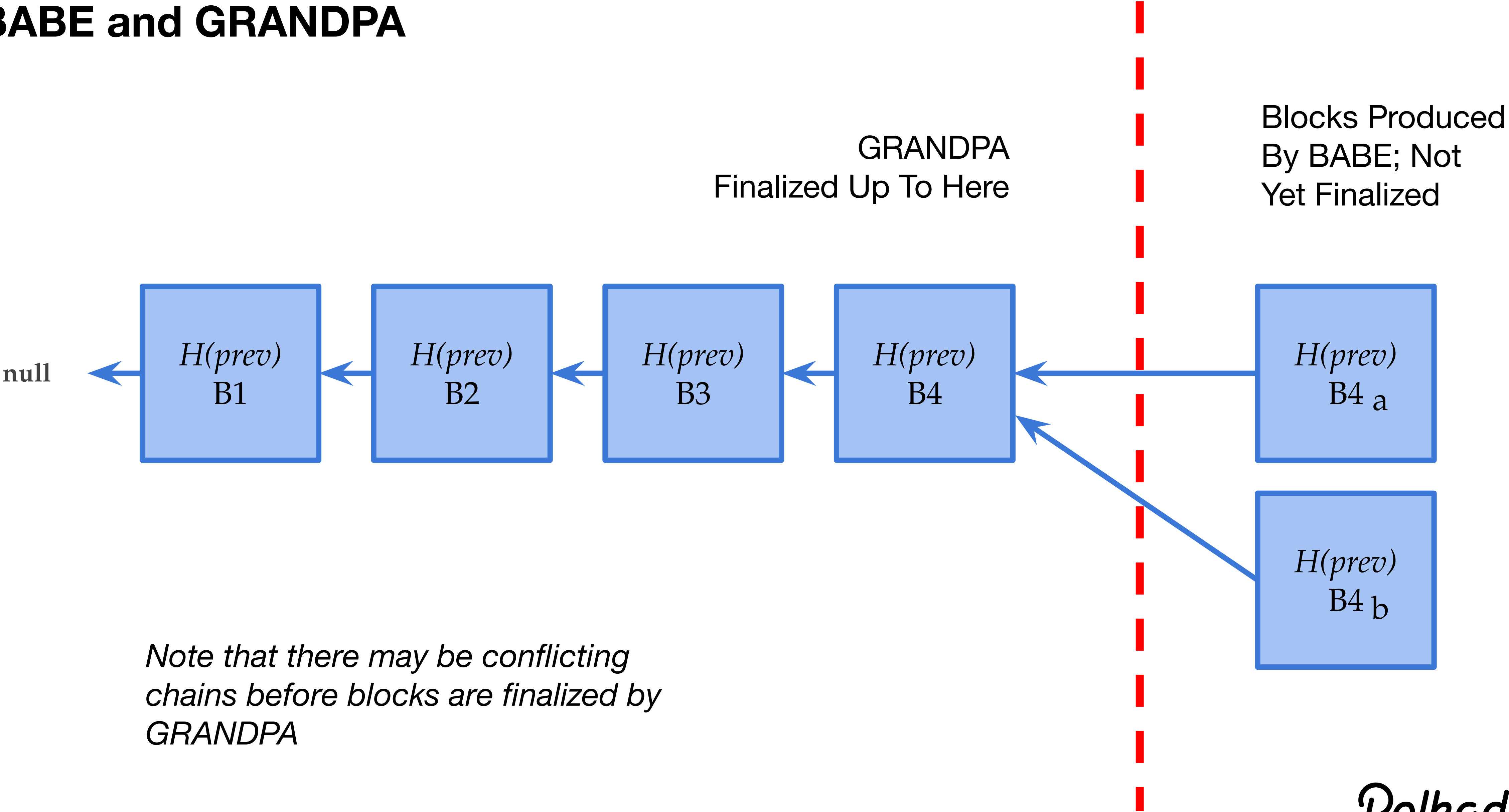
→ BABE (Blind Assignment for Blockchain Extension)

- ◆ Validators randomly select themselves to produce blocks
- ◆ Validators selected by amount of stake (tokens)
- ◆ For "young" blocks that are newly created

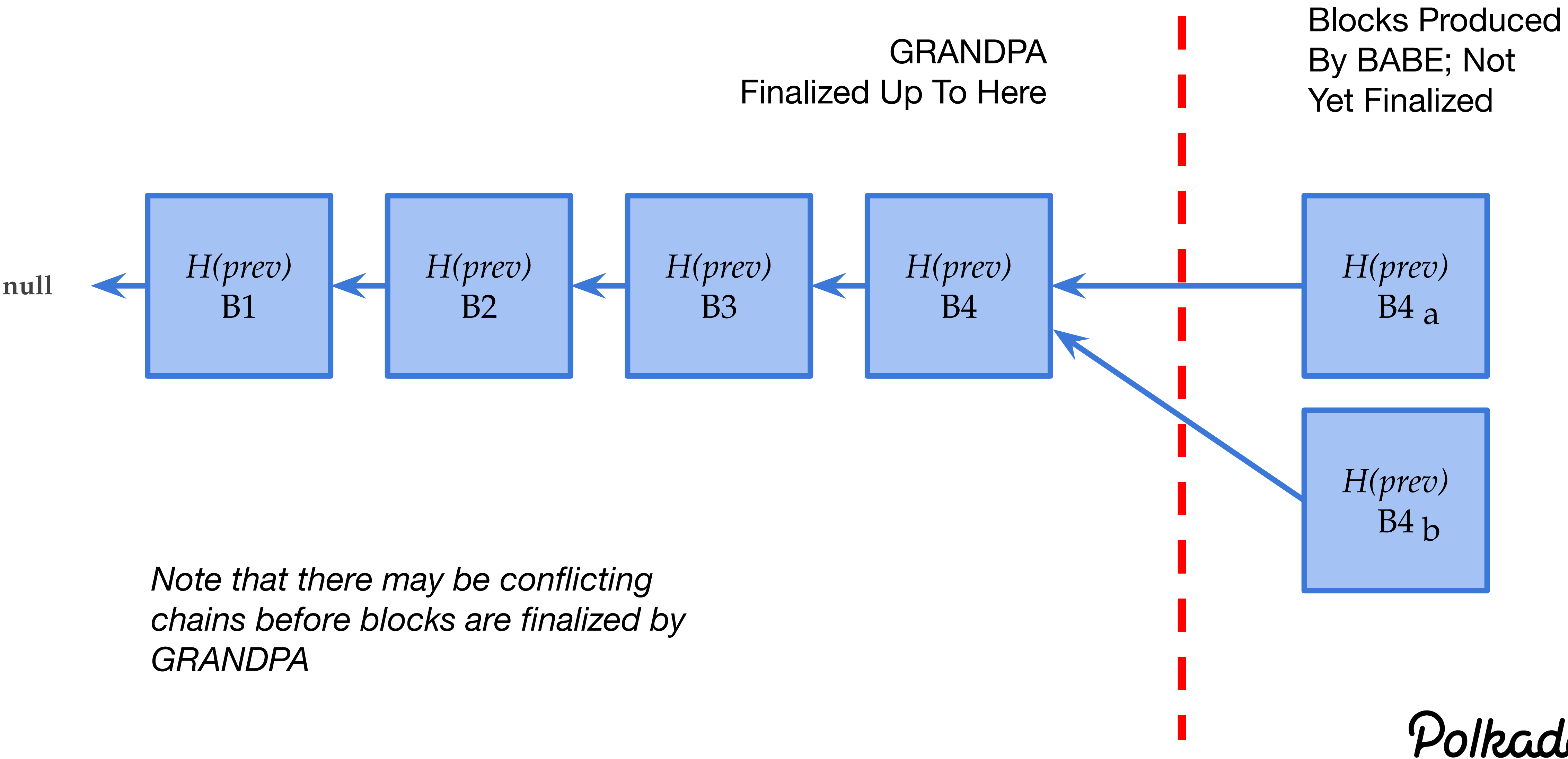
→ GRANDPA (GHOST-based Recursive ANcestor Deriving Prefix Agreement)

- ◆ Finalizes blocks separately
- ◆ For "old" blocks.. blocks must be produced before they are finalized

BABE and GRANDPA

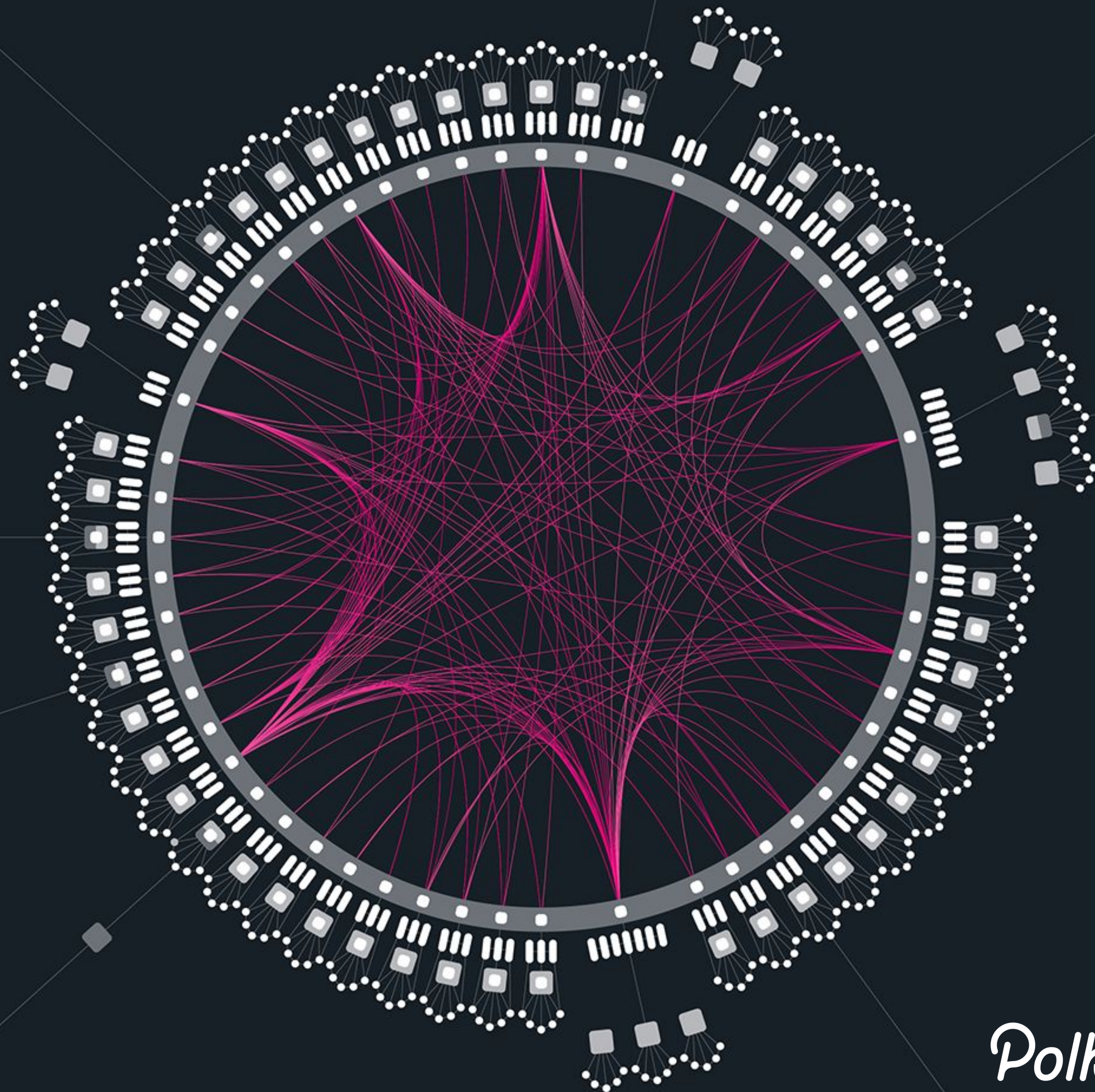


BABE and GRANDPA



BABE

Polkadot's Block
Production Protocol

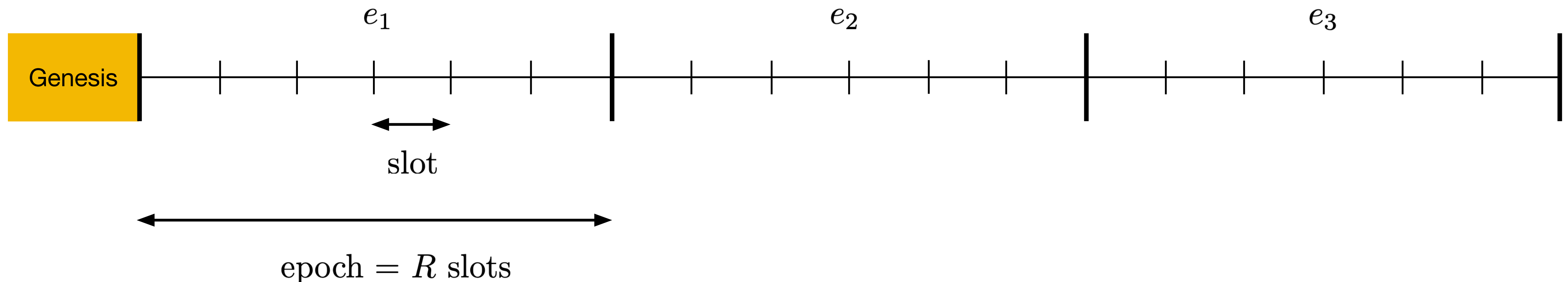


Polkadot.

BABE (Blind Assignment for Blockchain Extension)

Overview

- BABE [1] is a proof of stake (PoS) protocol
- BABE's design is similar to Ouroboros Praos [2]
- It does not depend on any central clock.

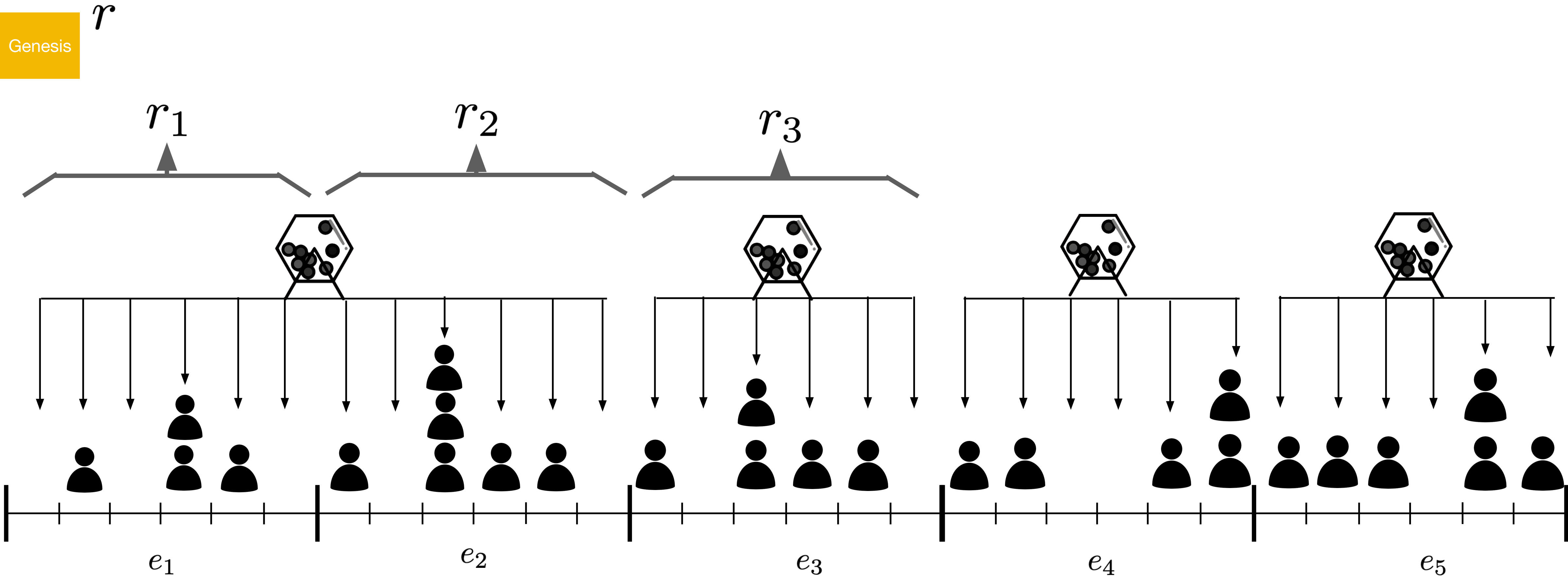


[1] Alper, Handan Kilinc. <https://research.web3.foundation/en/latest/polkadot/BABE/Babe/>

[2] David, Bernardo, et al. "Ouroboros Praos: An adaptively-secure, semi-synchronous proof-of-stake blockchain." Annual International Conference on the Theory and Applications of Cryptographic Techniques. Springer, Cham, 2018.

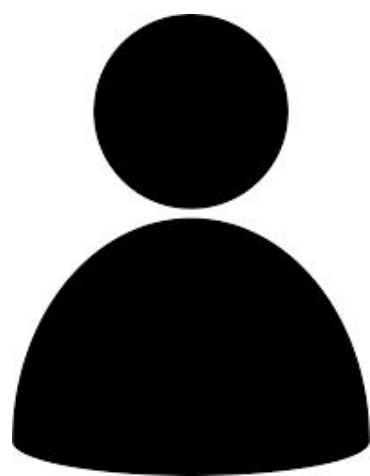
BABE (Blind Assignment for Blockchain Extension)

Overview



KEYS IN BABE

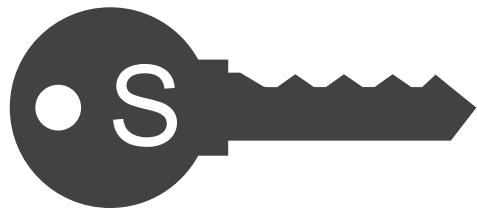
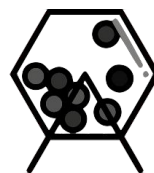
Validator



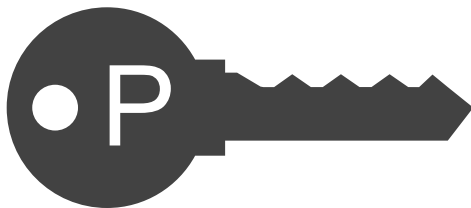
Block Signing
Key



Lottery
Key



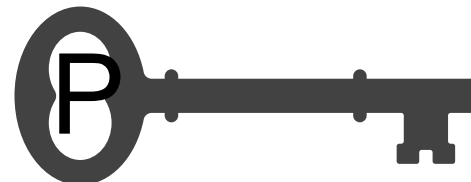
secret
key



public
key



secret
key



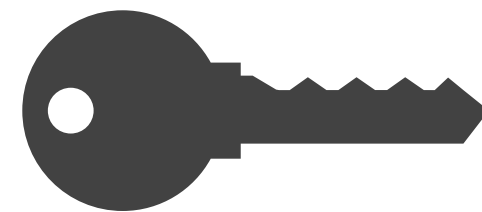
public
key

VERIFIABLE RANDOM FUNCTION

VRF

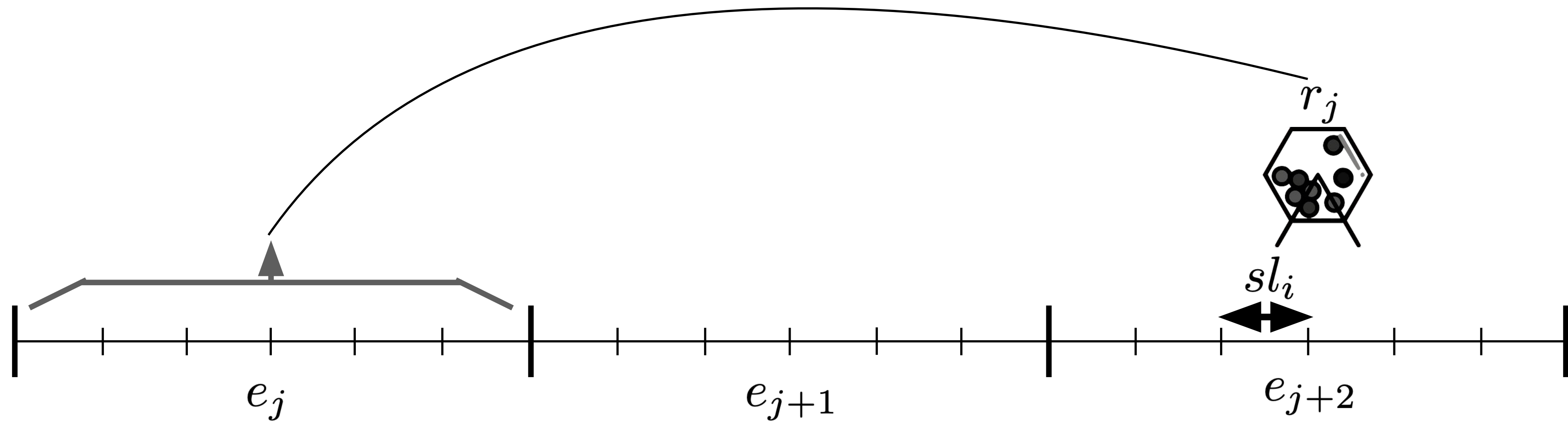
$F(\text{key}, x) \rightarrow 3819\dots2773$

$\text{Prove}(\text{key}, x, 3819\dots2773) \rightarrow \boxed{\text{PROOF}}$

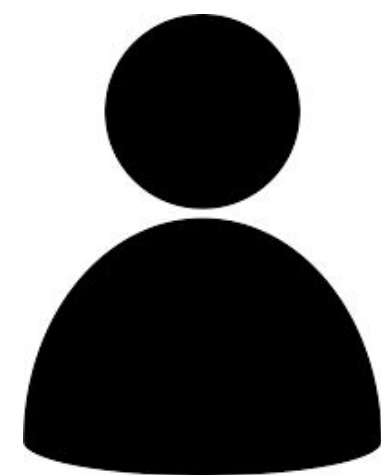


$\boxed{\text{PROOF}} \rightarrow \checkmark \quad \times$

LOTTERY
Slot Leader Selection



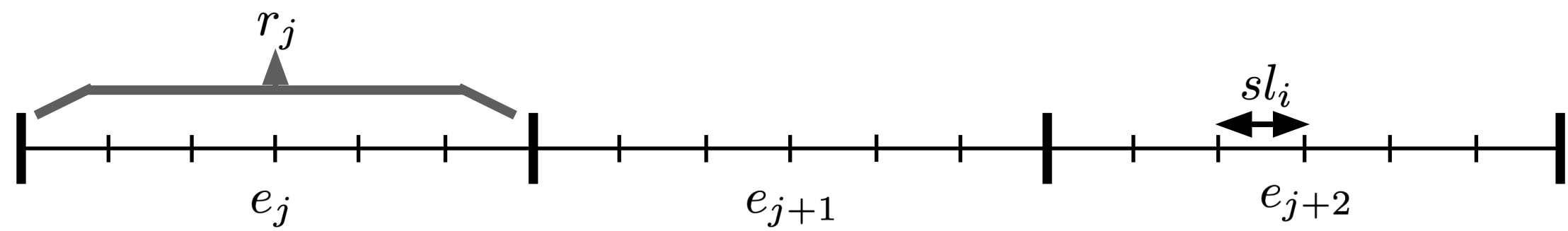
Validator



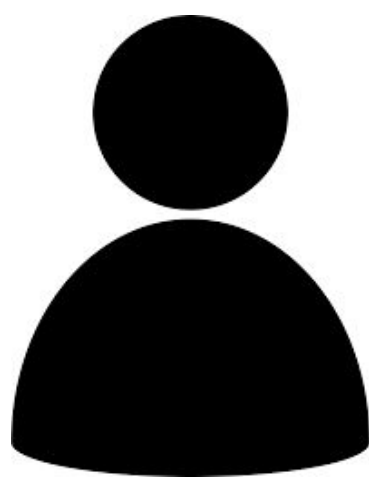
$$\mathbb{F} \left(\text{key}, r_j || sl_j || e_{j+2} \right) \longrightarrow v$$

$$v < \tau$$

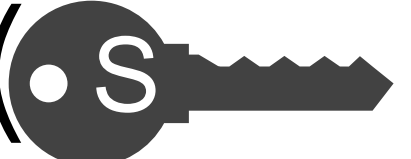
BLOCK PRODUCTION



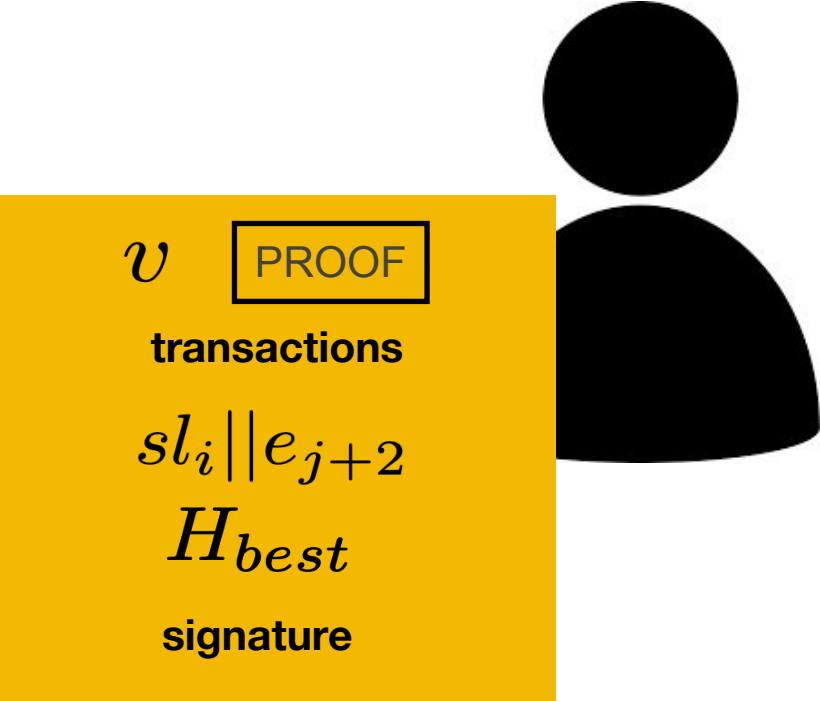
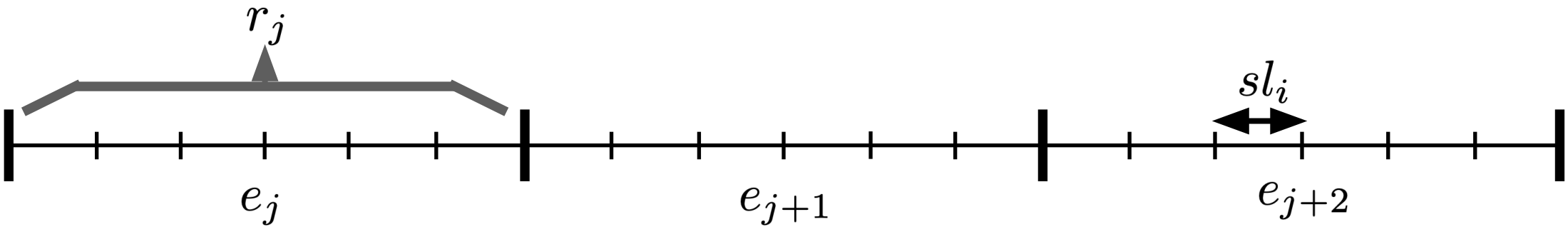
Validator



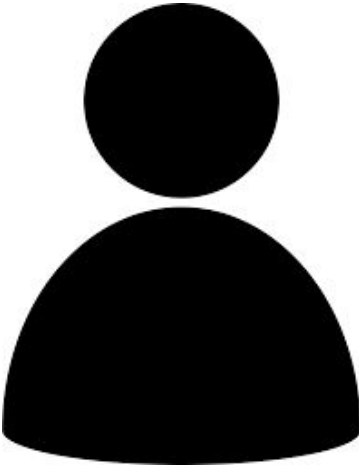
- if $v < \tau$, the validator produces a block for the slot sl_i in epoch e_{j+2}

Prove ( , $r_j || sl_j || e_{j+2}$, v) \longrightarrow PROOF

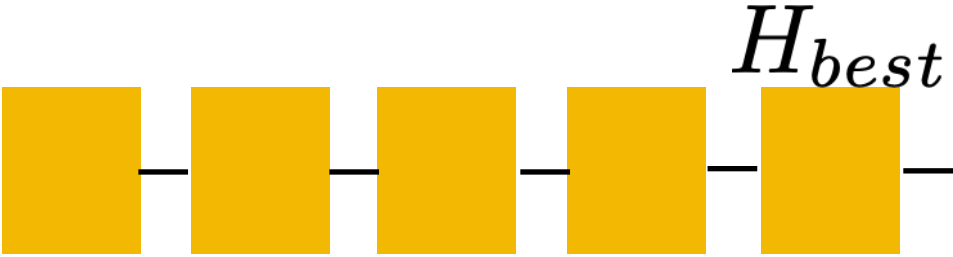
CHAIN EXTENSION



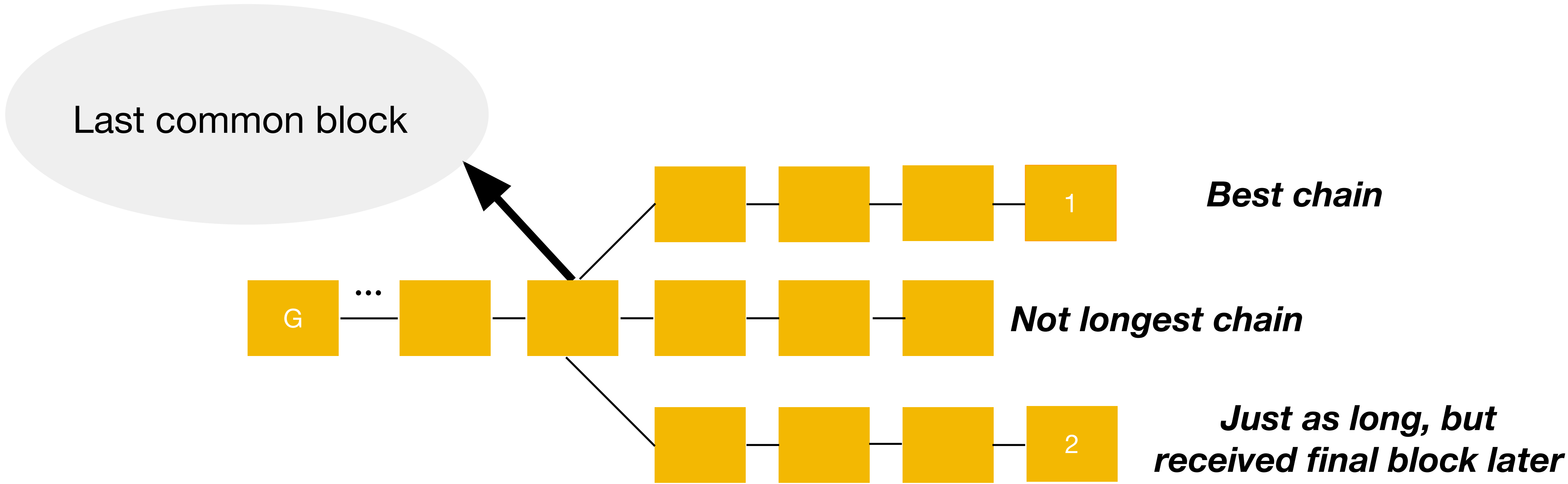
Validator



- if $v \geq \tau$, the validator collects blocks
 - Check if there is any chain with the hash
 - Verify the signature
 - Check if the validator is a slot leader
 - Check if there is any other block by the same validator for the same slot



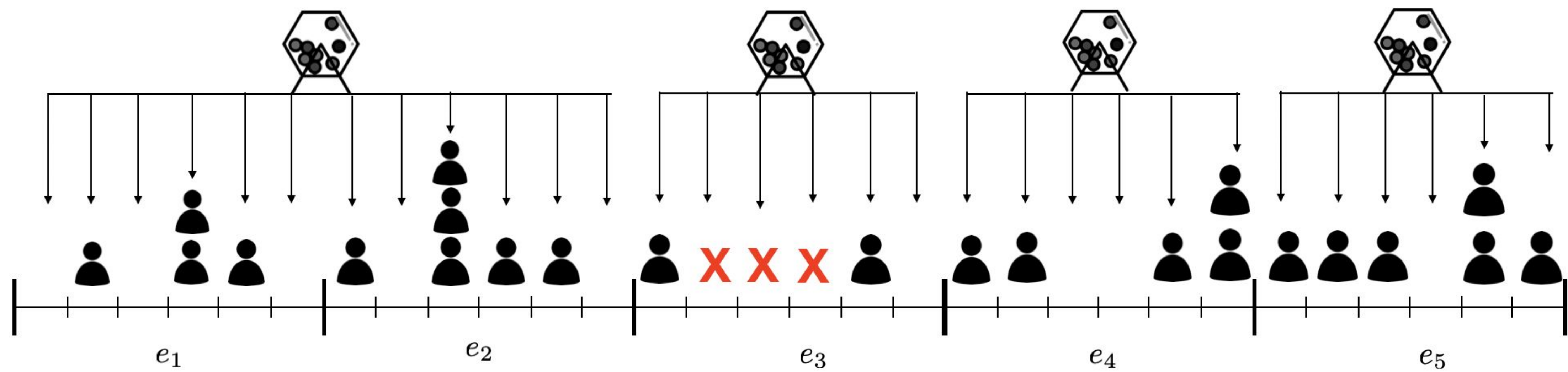
BEST CHAIN SELECTION



Longest chain rule, with ties broken by first block received

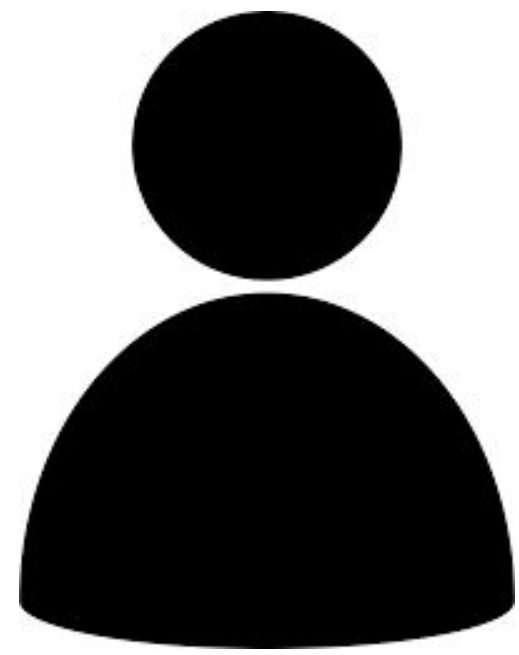
ADJUSTMENT FOR CONSTANT BLOCK TIME

Note long period of time (red X's) with no blocks!



Secondary Blocks

Validator

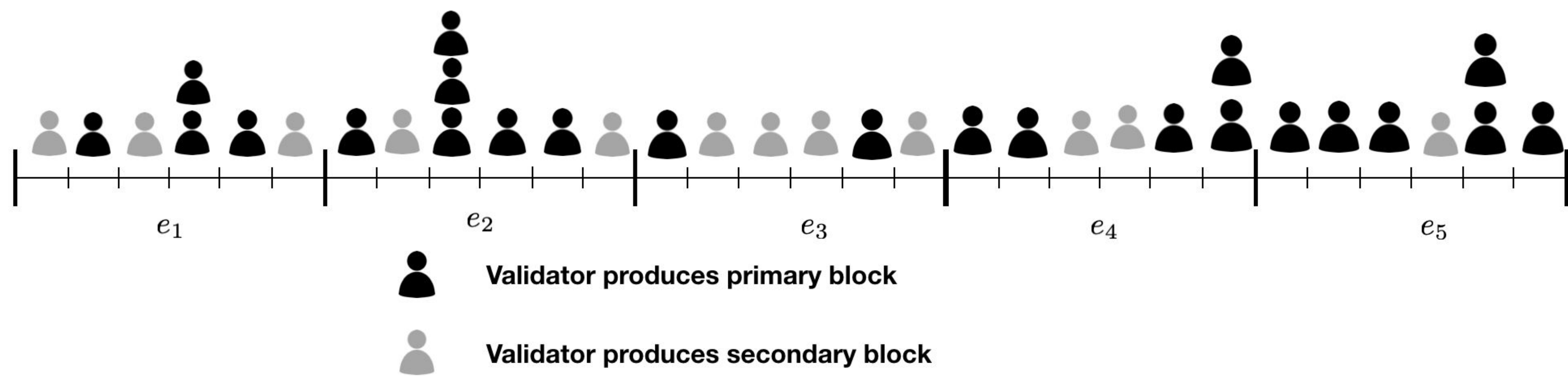


Validator will produce a secondary block if it is their "turn" (determined by calculating if their authority number matches the one produced by the above algorithm).

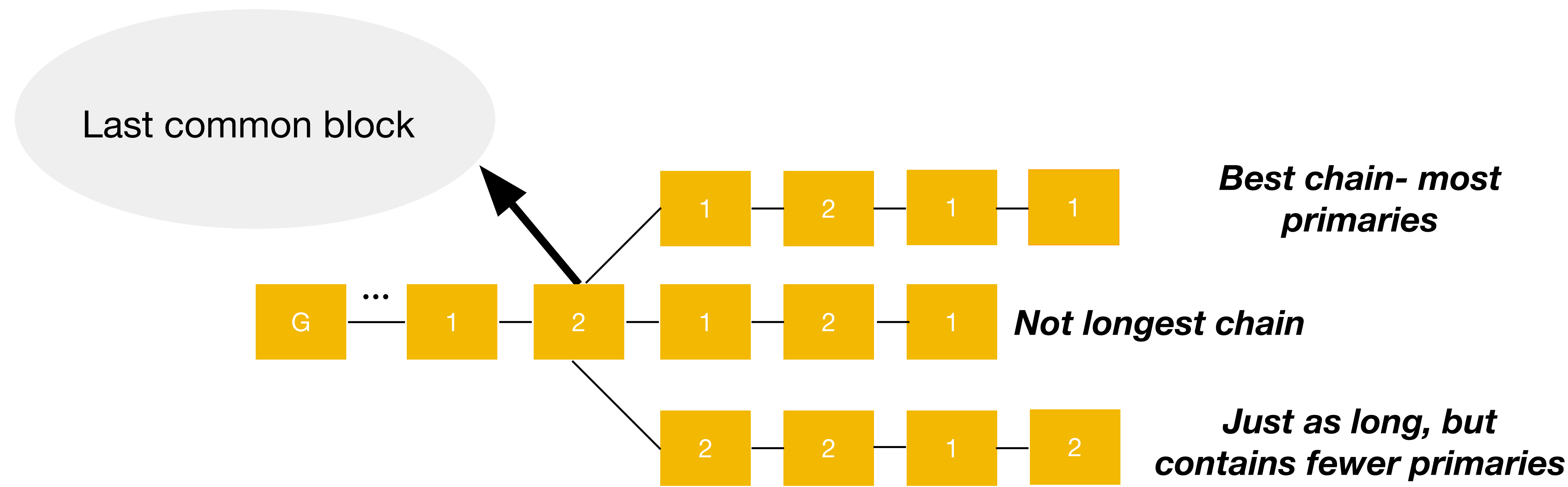
Secondary blocks are "outweighed" by primary blocks if one is produced in that same slot. Secondary blocks provide less security than primaries, although everyone can verify that they did “take their turn” since all the information is public.

ADJUSTMENT FOR CONSTANT BLOCK TIME

*Note there is now a block for every slot,
although some are primary and some secondary.*



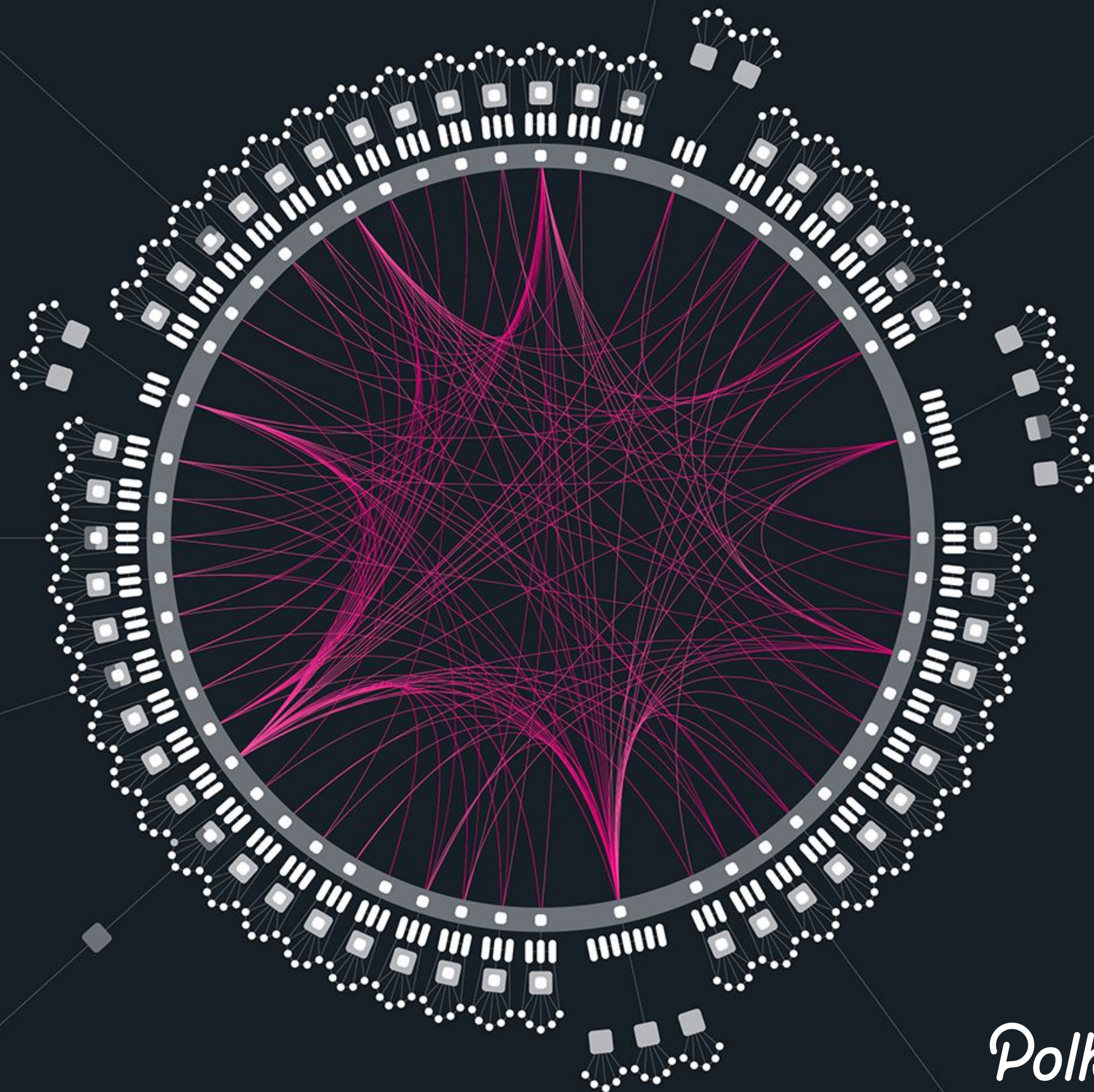
BEST CHAIN SELECTION WITH SECONDARY BLOCKS



The longest chain as measured by number of primaries

GRANDPA

Polkadot's Block
Finalization Protocol

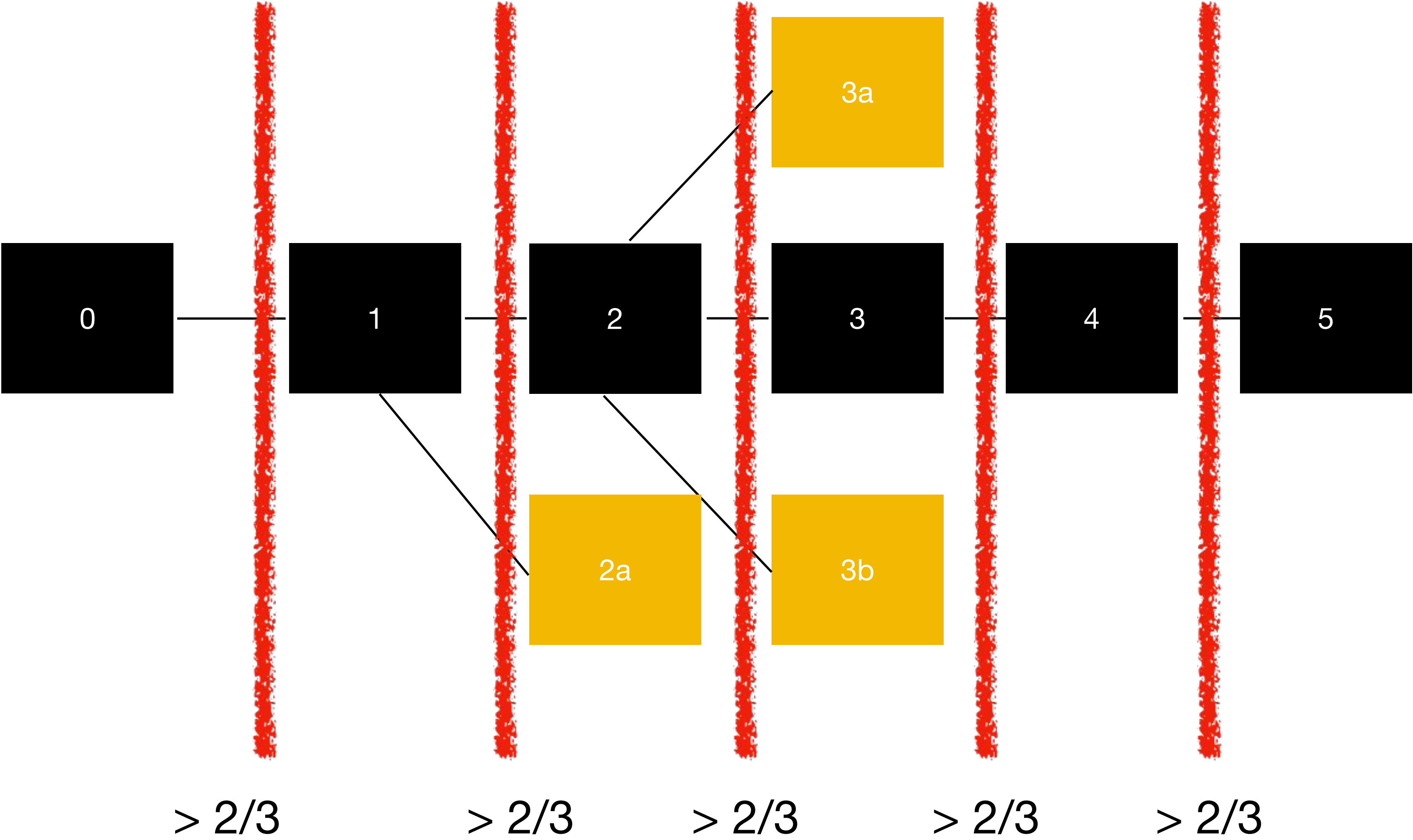


Polkadot.

Provable Deterministic Finalization

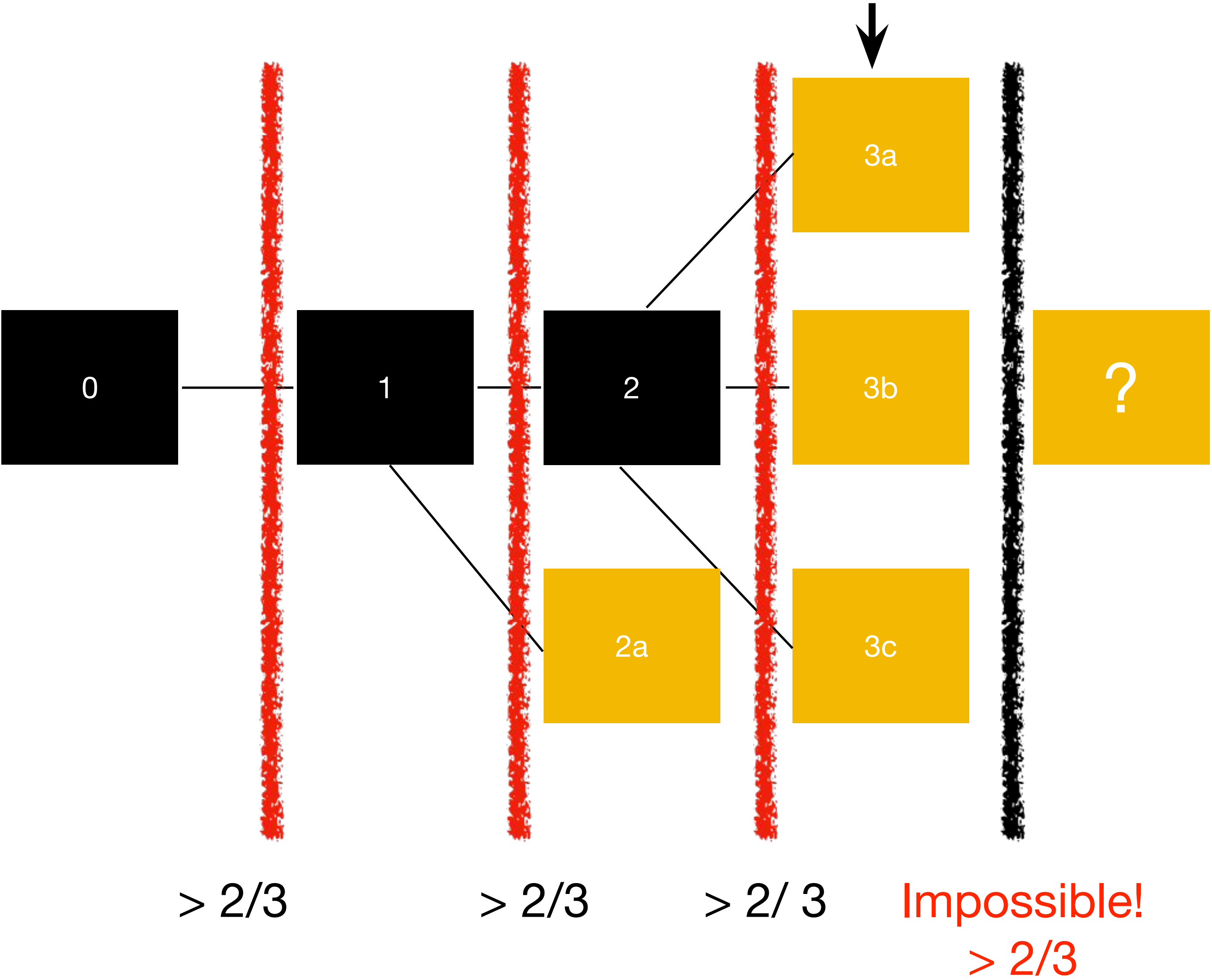
- We know the size of the validator set and that they should have roughly equal stake (using a weighted Phragmen algorithm)
- One way is to have a supermajority ($2/3$) of validators "sign off" on a block
 - ◆ All validators considered equal, even if stake is not
- This is vulnerable to stalling in a Byzantine environment

CLASSIC BLOCK-BY-BLOCK BFT (SIMPLIFIED)



Stalled Due to Partition

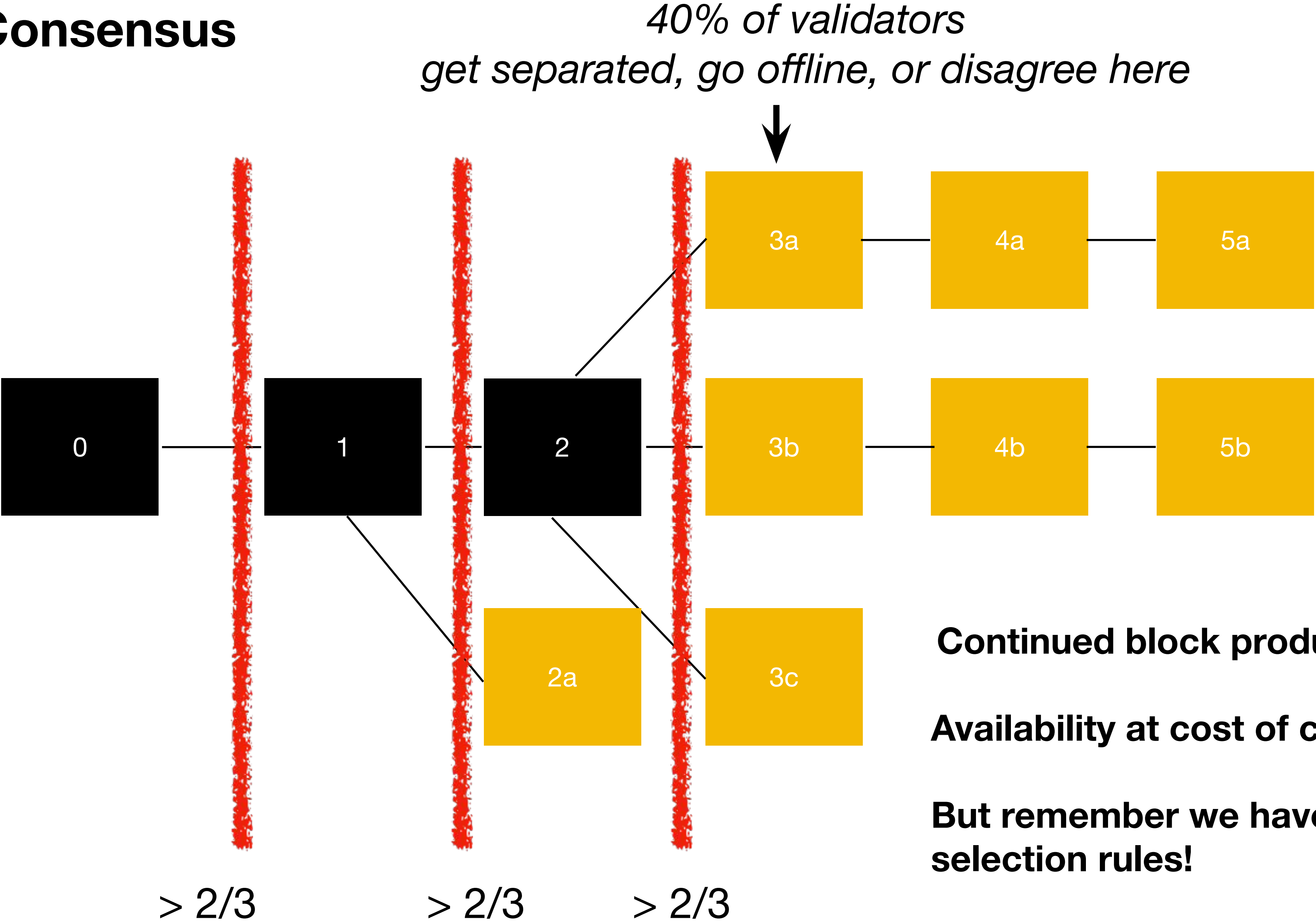
*40% of validators
get separated or go offline here*



GRANDPA

- GHOST-based Recursive ANcestor Deriving Prefix Agreement
- Byzantine agreement proposal
- Allows everyone to agree on a chain by following a simple fork rule choice
- Can work with many different block production mechanisms
- Goal: agree on many blocks at once, as opposed to single-block Byzantine agreement protocols
 - ◆ Since probabilistic finality block production may continue for a long time without GRANDPA, it needs to “catch up”

Hybrid Consensus

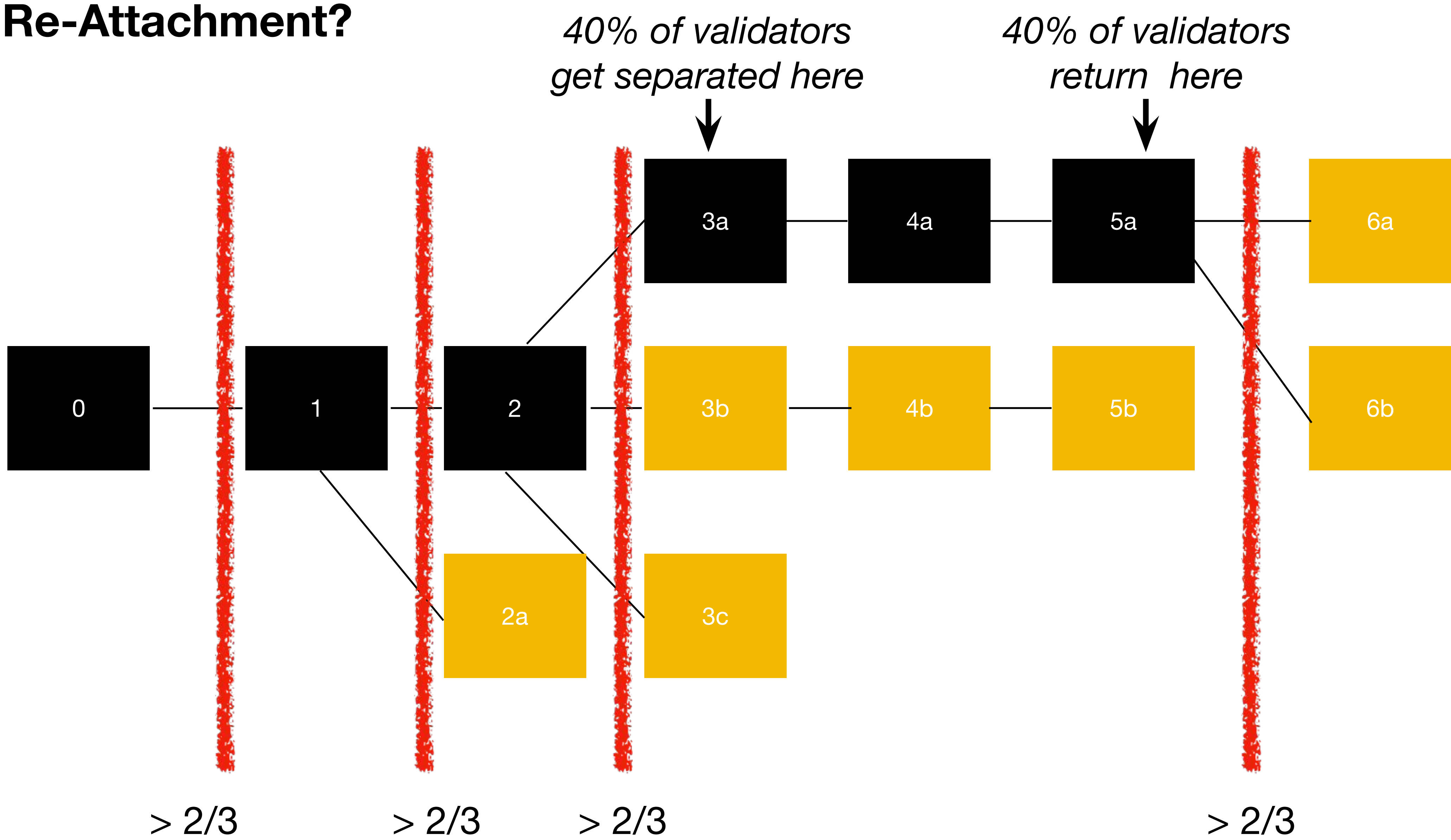


Continued block production with BABE

Availability at cost of consistency

**But remember we have BABE chain
selection rules!**

Re-Attachment?



GRANDPA VOTING PHASES

1. Primary Selection

One validator is selected (in rotation) to be primary

They broadcast their estimate for the last round

2. Prevote

All validators prevote

Each validator applies $\frac{2}{3}$ -GHOST rule, g , to set of prevotes they see, V

3. Precommit

Each validator precommits and broadcasts $g(V)$

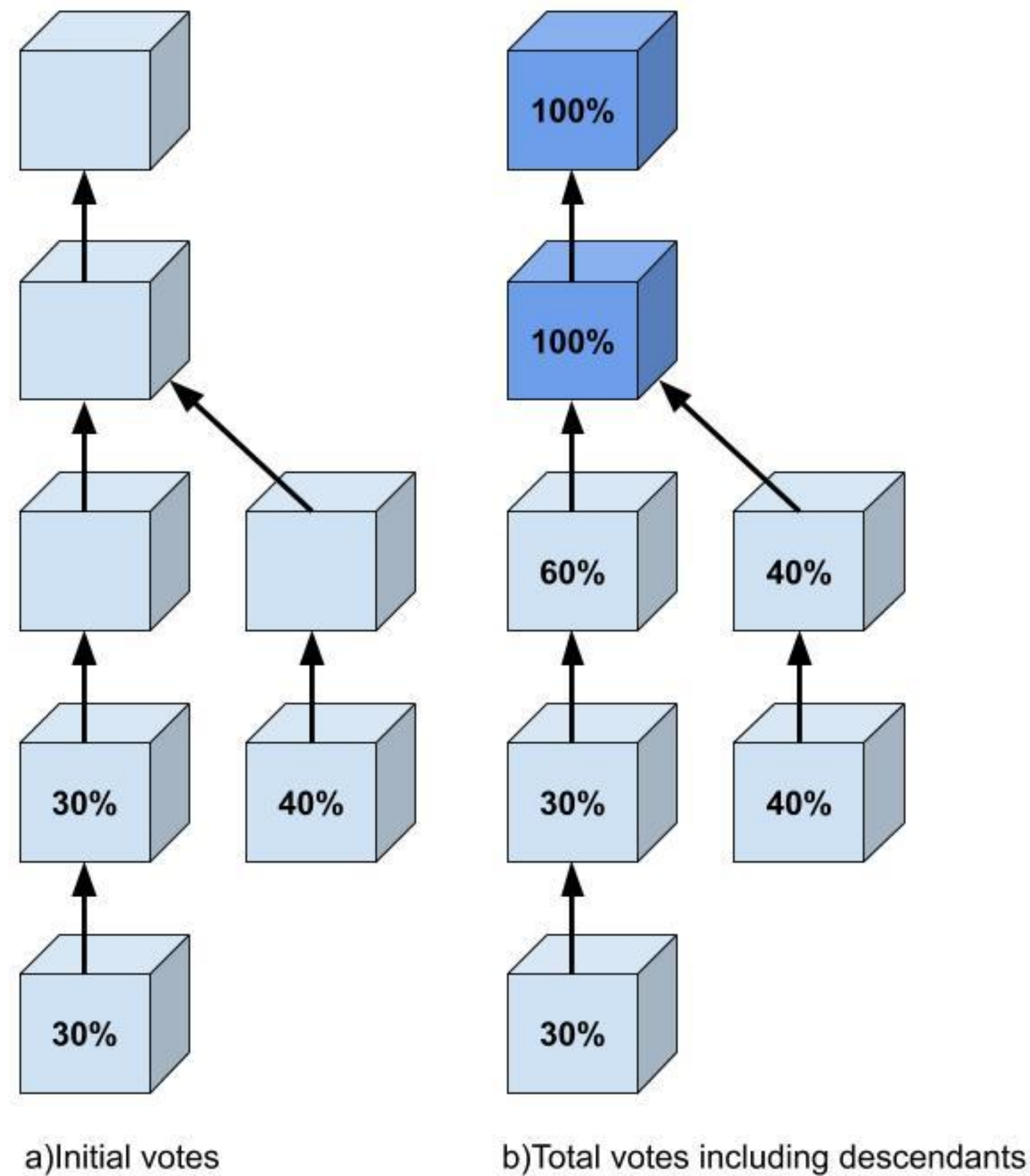
Validators gather precommits that they see, C

Validators finalize block indicated by $g(C)$

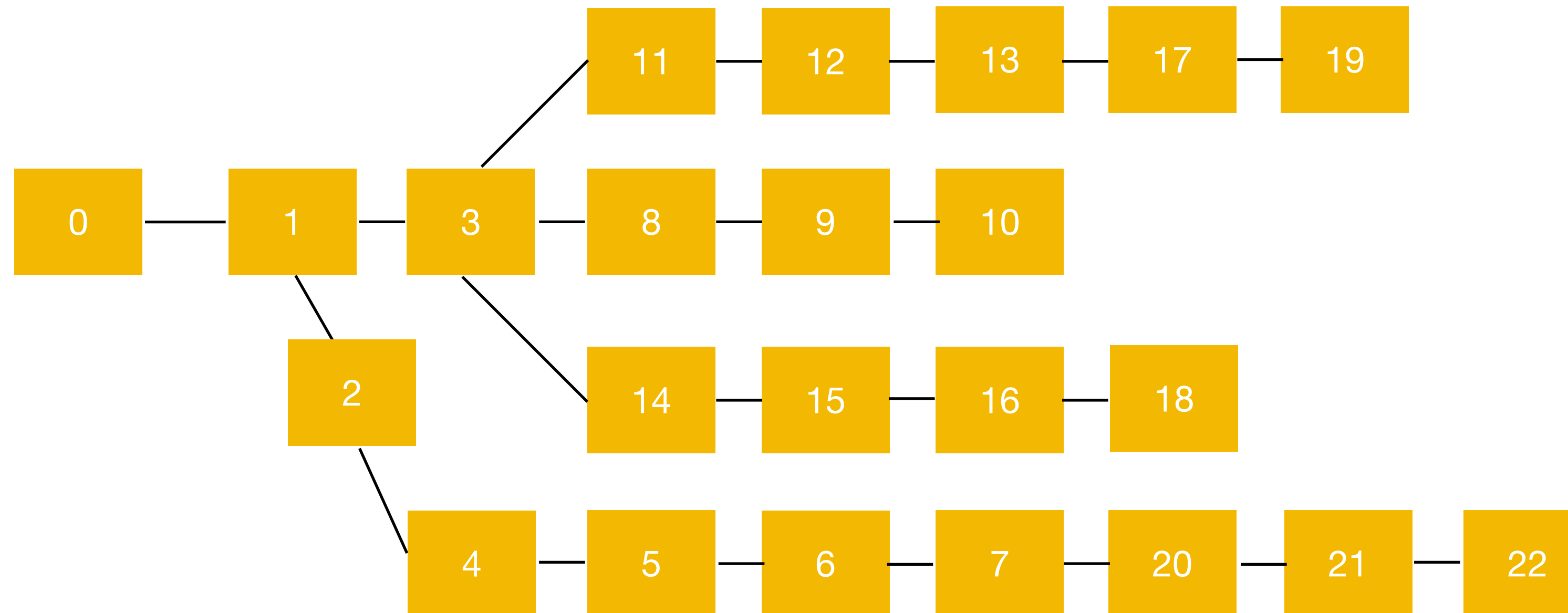
2/3 GHOST Rule

1. Start at genesis block
2. Include the child of that block that $> \frac{2}{3}$ of voters voted for descendants of
3. The head of this chain is $g(V)$, where V is the set of all votes

GRANDPA Voting Overview



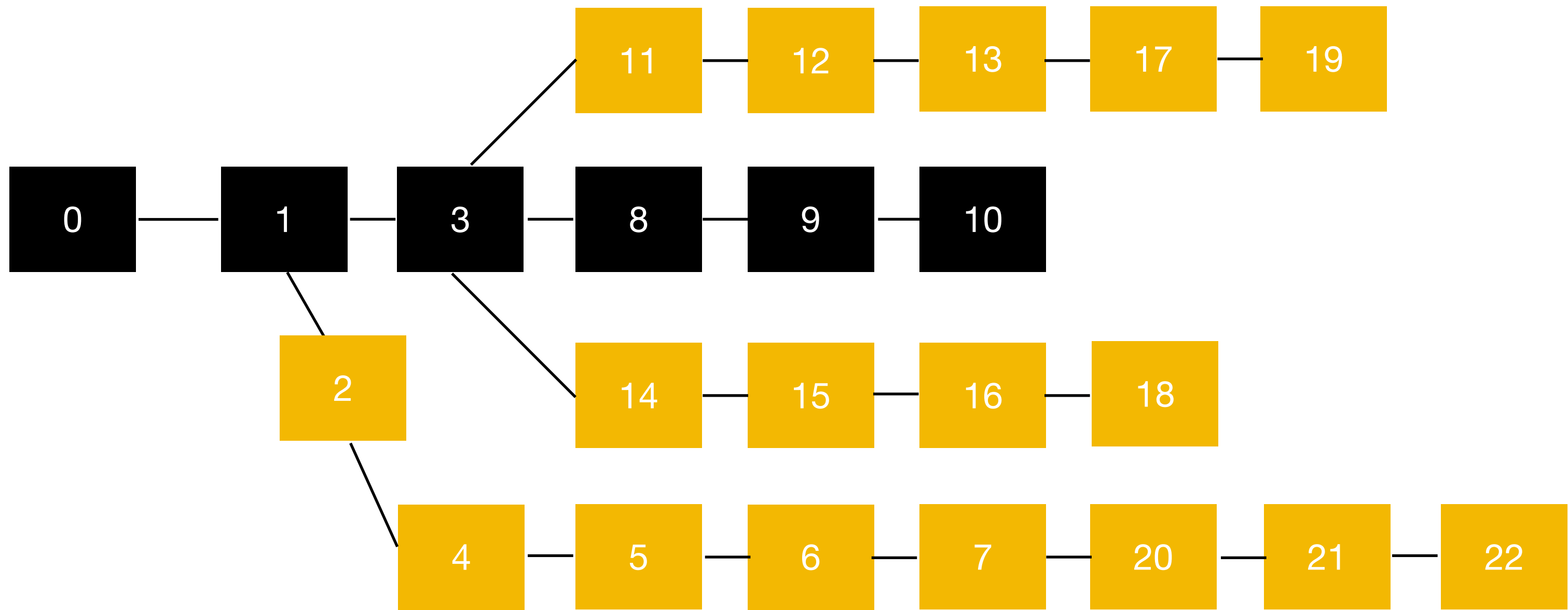
VOTES ARE ON BLOCKS



All chains have at least one common ancestor;
No conflicting chains will have a common
descendant

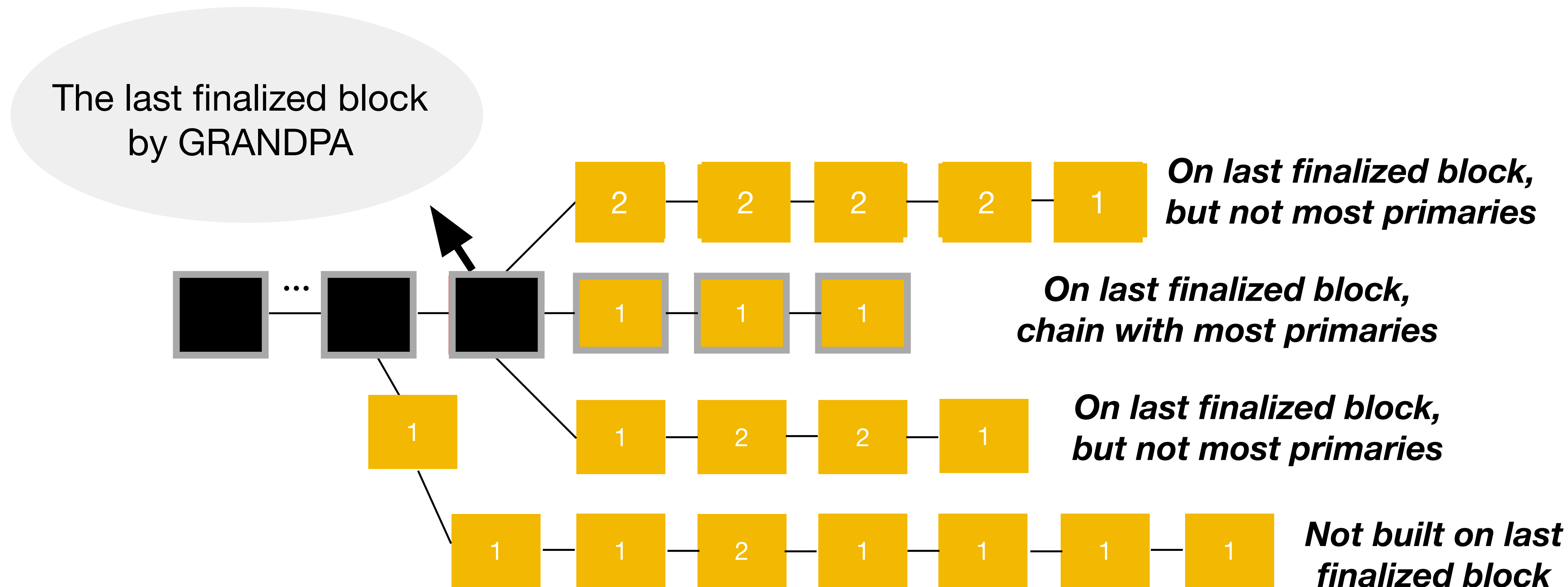
... WHICH ALLOWS FAST FINALIZATION OF CHAINS

Finalizing 10 implies a canonical chain
0-1-3-8-9-10



Future BABE blocks should be built on top of the 0..10 chain

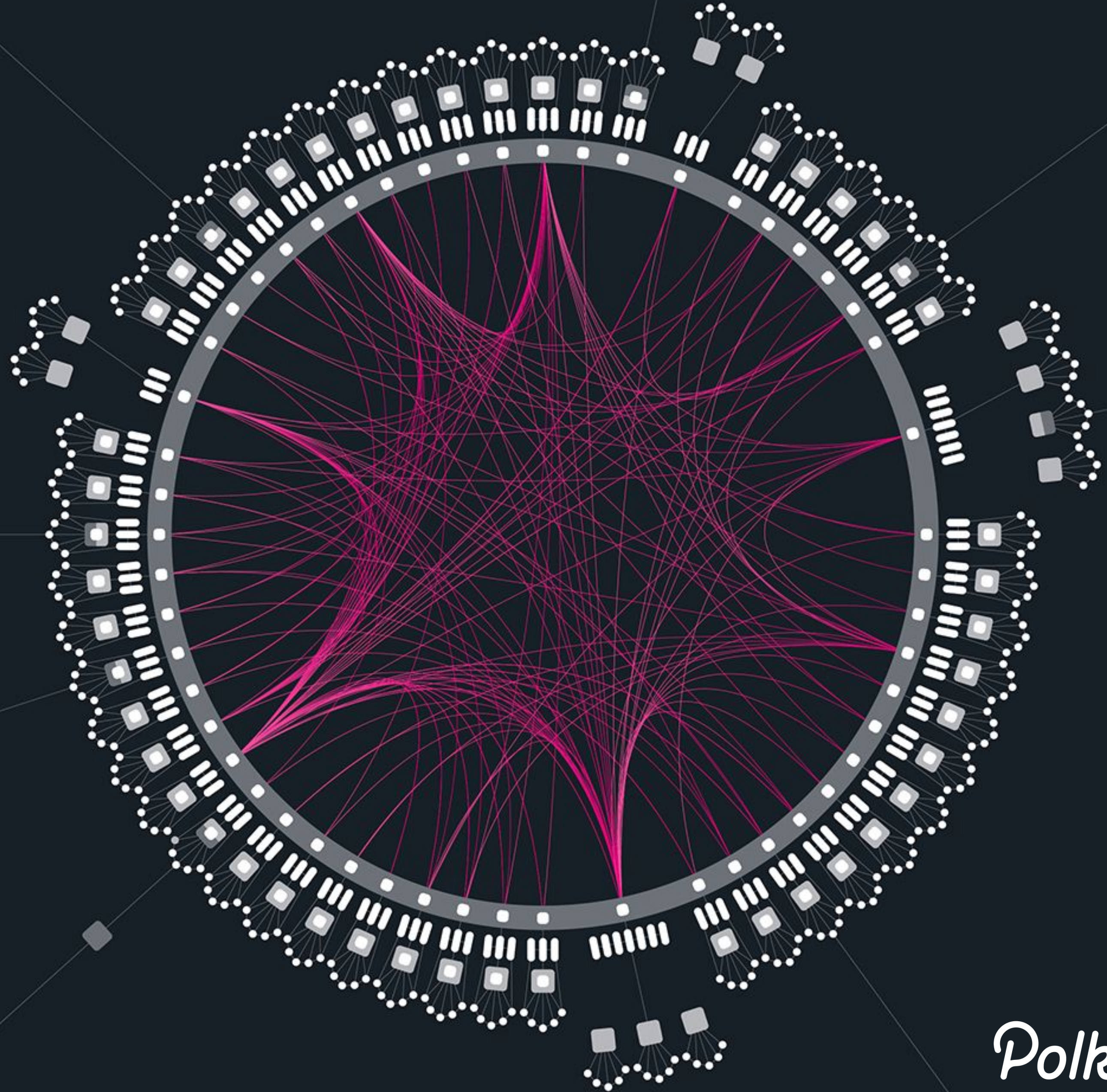
FINAL BEST CHAIN SELECTION



Longest chain (measured by primaries) on last finalized GRANDPA block

PENALTIES

What happens if someone
tries to cheat?

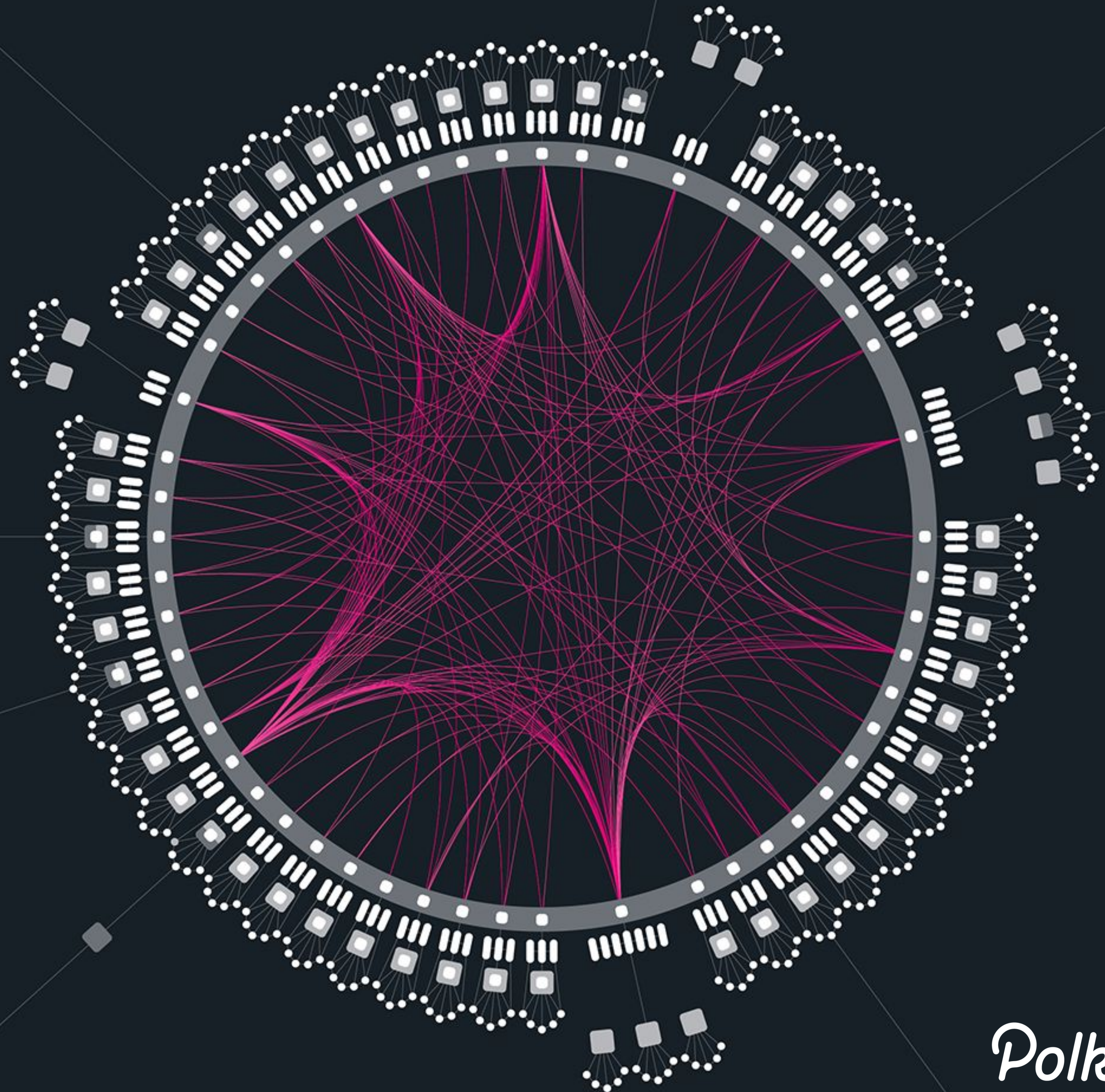


Polkadot.

Slashing

- A percentage of stake is deducted if you do something malicious or otherwise detrimental to the network
- Slashing penalties increase as number of participants increase
- Information about potential slashing penalties is kept off-chain by validators
- No matter what chain ends up being finalized, malicious or incompetent validators can be slashed on that chain

CONCLUSION



Polkadot.

HYBRID CONSENSUS

- Block production (via BABE) and finalization (via GRANDPA) are separate mechanisms
- Allows provable finality without the drawbacks of stalling, with fallback to probabilistic finality in cases of network partition or malicious validator behavior
- Used in Polkadot, launched May 2020, (> 8 million blocks) and Kusama, running since November 2019 (> 11 million blocks)