

# Legislative Organization: Centripetal and Centrifugal Forces

Shane Martin

University of Essex

shane.martin@essex.ac.uk

**Chapter Abstract:** Legislatures are a cornerstone of representative democracy. Electoral systems determine how votes are transformed into legislative seats. Because of this, what legislators must do to win re-election is shaped by electoral rules. The impact of electoral incentives goes beyond behavior, potentially shaping the rules and procedures of the legislature itself. This chapter analyses theories and evidence which link legislative organization to members' electoral incentives. However, not all legislative structures have a clear electoral basis. As this chapter suggests, the relationship between electoral systems and how a legislature chooses to organize itself is a conditional one.

**Keywords:** Electoral Incentives; Electoral Systems; Legislative Organization; Legislatures; Parliaments; Legislative Particularism; Personal Vote; Committees

**Note:** Figure 1 and Figure 2 are reproduced here by permission of John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Prepared for Erik Herron, Robert Pekkanen, and Matthew Soberg Shugart, eds.  
*The Oxford Handbook of Electoral Systems*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

*[T]he organization of Congress meets remarkably well the electoral needs of its members. To put it another way, if a group of planners sat down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members' electoral needs year in and year out, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists [Mayhew, 1974: 81-82]*

Legislatures are ubiquitous. They are often the foundation stone of democracy at the local, sub-national, national and even supra-national level. In all democracies, legislatures play important roles in law-making, executive oversight and representation of citizens' interests and preferences. In parliamentary regimes, the executive comes from the legislature. Legislatures can even play significant roles in authoritarian regimes.

This chapter is concerned with legislative organization and in particular how electoral systems shape legislative organization. Alemán (2015: 145) helpfully defines legislative organization as “the set of procedures that regulate the legislative process and the related set of offices with internal authority.” Legislatures vary significantly in how they are organized (Martin, Saalfeld, and Strøm 2014). Variation may occur over time in the same legislature, when we compare different legislatures, or when we compare different chambers in a multi-cameral legislature. Thus the British Parliament is organized very differently to the United States Congress, which is different in organization from many of the US State legislatures. The US House of Representatives is structurally very differently to the US Senate. Virtually all legislatures update their organization at least occasionally. Scholars have been long intrigued by cross-sectional, inter-cameral and inter-temporal variation in the rules and procedures of legislatures (Zubek

2015; Sieberer et al. 2016). The structure and significance of committees has been a core focus for those interested in legislative organization (Martin 2014a).

One possible explanation of legislative organization is the electoral system used to select legislators. By deciding how votes at an election are translated into seats in the legislature, electoral systems shape what politicians must do in order to get elected and re-elected. Decades of research on various legislatures suggests that legislators are electorally oriented in their behavior (for overviews see Zittel and Uslaner 2009, André et al. 2016a, and André and Depauw, this volume). Yet electoral considerations may well impact far more than behavior. As the quote from Mayhew at the top of this chapter illustrates, how a legislature chooses to organize itself may be directly impacted by members' electoral needs. If this is the case, we should be able to theoretically link variation in legislative organization to variation in electoral rules, and support this supposition with some empirical evidence.

Theoretically, candidate-centered electoral systems ought to result in centrifugal legislatures with decentralized organizational structures. In contrast, party-centered electoral systems ought to produce centripetal legislatures with power concentrated in the chamber leadership or party leadership. In short, whether or not incumbents need to cultivate a personal-vote or a party-vote (Carey and Shugart 1995) defines incumbents' interests and, by extension, should shape legislative organization.

Understanding legislative organization is crucial because it allows uncovering the ‘black-box’ between electoral systems and public policy. While scholars have long postulated a relationship between electoral systems and public policy, we know very little about exactly how this happens (Rickard 2012). In other words, we may know the rationale for why electoral rules shape policy outcomes but not the foundational mechanism by which political elites are able to respond to incentives. Legislative organization may be the mechanism by which public policy is shaped in responses to members’ electoral incentives. Indeed, the link between electoral incentives and policy outputs may be fragmented by particular forms of legislative organization. Thus, legislative organization may serve to facilitate members’ preferences or, as I suggest in this chapter, it may condition (weaken) the effect of electoral incentives by taking powers and policy perquisites away from individual members.

The chapter is organized as follows: Next, I review theories of legislative organization which link centrifugal force in the United States Congress to members’ electoral goals. I then review how such theories have been applied to other legislative settings. In section three, I discuss the conditions under which legislative organization appears misaligned to members’ electoral incentives. I conclude the chapter with suggestions for future research.

### **The Electoral Basis of Congressional Organization**

Conventional wisdom suggests that members of the United States Congress are influenced heavily by electoral considerations (Mayhew 1974; Fenno 1978). Because members of Congress need to build a personal reputation with constituents in order to aid re-election, district

preferences drive representative behavior (Miller and Stokes, 1963). In addition, incumbents take on constituency case-work and other vote-winning activities in their district.

Yet, electoral incentives shape not only preferences; electoral incentives may play a role in shaping the organizational structure of Congress itself. Specific attention has focused on the reason for committees' popularity as a form of legislative organizations in the United States Congress. Some of the most compelling arguments for a link between electoral systems and legislators' preferences over internal legislative structures, as distinct from behavior, is provided by scholars of the United States Congress. These scholars have posited a relationship between the electoral system and the significance of committees in legislative structures within Congress. More specifically, strong committees within Congress are associated with the candidate-centered electoral environment and the related need for members of Congress to cultivate a personal vote in order to secure re-election. Katz and Sala (1996) suggest that with the emergence of the secret ballot and the resulting need for incumbent members to appeal directly to voters, legislators looked to committees as a means of creating policy changes (and distributive benefits) for which they could claim credit in their home districts. In explaining the strength of committees in Congress, Shepsle and Weingast (1987) explore the role of a strong committee system in meeting the electoral needs of members of Congress. They argue that strong committees exist because, in the parlance of electoral studies scholars, committees serve to allow members to cultivate personal votes. Members choose to organize the legislature not around strong parties but around committees with strong property rights that allows members

safeguard policy issues of most concern to their constituents and distribute particularistic spending projects to their districts.

This *distributive* theory gains its designation from the suggestion that legislatures are organized around strong committees to allow members to distribute particularistic benefits to their constituents. Such benefits could include specific policies favored by voters in the member's district or so called *pork-barrel* spending (fiscal legislative particularism), which refers to the practice of allocating for political reasons national tax revenues on economically inefficient, geographically targeted, projects.

A number of assumptions underlie the distributive theory of legislative organizations. In particular, legislators' self-interest and motivations from the goal of re-election requires building personal reputations with constituents by providing vote-winning pork-barrel projects and aligning policy concerns with voters' salient issues. For example, rural voters may favor policies which promote agriculture, and in particular, assurance of continued flow of government subsidies to support rural communities. To be re-elected, incumbents must adopt policies most salient to their constituents, control public policy, and allocate scarce resources to the sector that enhances credentials with voters. Yet, in a plenary-centered legislature where simple majorities can enact changes to policy, each legislator is equal in ability to influence all proposals. Thus, to continue our example, unless representatives from rural areas control a majority of the plenary, they cannot control and claim credit for agricultural policy. Complicating the situations is that the existence of multiple salient policy issues disallows the likelihood that any one interest can

maintain a majority of the plenary. Social choice theory hypothesizes that political outcomes under such conditions, and assuming simple majority rules, are inherently unstable (Arrow 1951). The classic divide-the-dollar game illustrates the problem: In this game, three players must agree to divide a dollar. Under majority rules, any two can form a winning coalition to agree on the distribution of the 100 cents. Player A and Player B may agree to divide the dollar equally between them, leaving Player C with no money, thus “maximizing” the utility of A and B. However, Player C may offer a counter-proposal, perhaps by offering Player A 51 cents and retaining 49 cents, thus denying Player B any money and simultaneously improving Payer A’s position (by one cent). And so the game continues. No obvious result is available and any counter decision can easily negate a previous one.

The divide-the-dollar game applies, substantively, to any legislative setting which allocates scarce resources (Baron and Ferejohn 1989). Distribution of funding in pork-barrel politics is a classic example – legislators must collectively agree on the amount each member receives, but in a majority setting, any decision has the potential for alteration by a counter proposal, just as in the divide-the-dollar game. However, cycling can occur in less obvious ways: For simplicity, consider a House of Representatives divided three-ways based on members’ and their constituents’ preferences for policies. The focus of one group of incumbents is domestic manufacturing, the second agriculture, and the third urban environment, with all three interests aiming for spending-sensitive policy changes. This situation characterizes a sequential game, which requires a coalition of two groups to institute change. The domestic manufacturing and agricultural interests may coalesce with the agricultural group voting for the manufacturing group’s interests

with the agreement that the manufacturers will subsequently support agricultural interests at another time. But once the manufacturing bill gains approval, the manufactures have no incentive not to renege on any promise made to their agricultural colleagues. Instead, the rational action for the manufacturers would be to seek to strike a new deal to secure an additional allocation of the remaining resources. Thus, cycling emerges, with always changing coalitions and no credible ability to commit to logrolling – the sequential exchange of votes. The game, although simple, illustrates what social choice scholars typically refer to as the Condorcet cycle. In short, absent legislative organization, no decision is stable.

Shepsle and Weingast (1987) suggested that committees exist to break the chaos anticipated by cycling by allowing for credible commitment in logrolling, thus permitting members to secure vote-winning policies and spending for their constituents. If legislative chambers decide their internal organizations, the legislature can construct a system of committees to ensure that members with particular preferences for policies control those policy areas. Thus, representatives of agricultural interests seek establishment of an agricultural committee which has control of policies and allocation of resources that concern the industry – effectively removing decisions from the plenary and providing power to members who have the most to gain or lose in that policy area. Committees are a form of rules to prevent the breakdown of cooperation among groups with different priorities over policy and spending (Weingast and Marshall 1988).



Such parsimonious, but nonetheless powerful, explanations of committees' distributive origin require a committee system to have four characteristics: First, committees must have the ability to control the agenda and the outcome in the policy jurisdictions – commonly known as gatekeeping powers. The plenary, thus, must delegate significant authority to committees, making the relevant committee an agenda-setter or veto-player in the legislative process. Consequently, any change in agricultural policy must require support of the relevant agricultural committee. Second, members must be able to self-select into preferred committees (Shepsle 1978). Third, and relatedly, committees are likely to be composed of 'policy-outliers' (Shepsle and Weingast 1987). In other words, committees should not be representative of the plenary (or the plenary median) but should include members with extreme preferences toward the committee's jurisdiction. Thus, to continue the example, an agricultural committee would consist of members strongly interested in, and committed to, that industry. As such, the committee would be 'unrepresentative' of the chamber. Fourth, committee membership should associate with policy or financial rewards for a member's district.

The suggestion of committees as institutional solutions to drive geographically-focused particularistic distribution, and thus incumbents' re-elections, has had a profound effect on the study of social choice theory and American political institutions. Yet, the idea that electoral incentives drive the organization of Congress is not without its critics. For example, Berry and Fowler (2016) question the causal link between committee assignments and pork-barrel spending, instead finding that seats on key committees produce little additional spending. The

proposition that committee membership fails to provide mechanisms for vote winning provides a fundamental challenge to the distributive theory of legislative organization.

The distributive perspective has also been questioned on theoretical grounds. The *informational* theory of legislative organization proposed by Gilligan and Krehbiel (1987) challenges the electoral-based distributive theory, suggesting instead that the legislature is structured to maximize members' acquisition and sharing of information (Gilligan and Krehbiel 1987; Gilligan and Krehbiel 1990; Krehbiel 1991). From this perspective, the organization of the legislature around strong committees allows member specialization. These gains from specialization facilitate informational advantages and tacit knowledge accumulation, resulting in better legislative activities of benefit to the entire chamber. In the distributive perspective, member's incentives revolve around delivering distributive benefits which aid re-election. In contrast, committees from the informational perspective provide a collective, but little individual, benefit.

Cox and McCubbins (1993) acknowledged that much of the observable work of Congress is undertaken within and between committees but suggested that political parties nevertheless play a crucial role in legislative organization. For Cox and McCubbins, the structuring of the system by political parties assists the party's leadership by cartelizing legislative power. The committee system, far from being the focal point of power, allows parties to control members. In this partisan cartel model of legislative organization, committees are not the dominant source of influence and authority which traditional accounts of congressional organization suggest.

Similar to the empirical investigation of earlier theories of legislative organization, Cox and McCubbins (1993) focus on the assignment (and reassignment) process – the rules by which members gain appointment to specific committees. The party leadership, Cox and McCubbins suggest, play a far more significant role in the assignment process than previously acknowledged. The analysis of assignments to committees, between 1947 and 1988, undermines the assumption that committees consist of policy outliers. Evidence suggests the party leaders cartelize the allocation of assignments and use the assignments strategically to reward loyal partisans and punish members who have defied the leadership during roll-call votes. A similar pattern of control emerges when exploring requests for switched assignments (reassignment of committee membership). In short, the suggestion is that the focus on committees as an important unit within Congress obscures the fact that party leaders control who sits on which committee. This control shapes not only the composition of committees, and by extension the nature of the committee, but also the power the party leadership wields, to enforce the party discipline.

While the distributive theory of legislative organization focused on individual member's electoral interests, such electoral-origin theories of congressional organization are no longer taken for granted in the Congressional literature. The centripetal force of the party leadership may serve to reduce the ability of members to use committees to win votes. At the same time, both the House of Representatives and the Senate likely enjoy some of the highest incumbency rates of any democratic legislature operating today – suggesting that the perquisites of Congressional

office, dispensed by legislative organization, greatly aid incumbents in holding their seats at election time.

### **Comparative Perspectives**

Given the inconclusive nature of the debate among Congressional scholars on the link between electoral incentives and congressional organization, it is worth exploring the geographical generalizability of the distributive theory. Cross-national variation in election systems should provide an opportunity to test, comparatively, any connection between institutionally-induced electoral incentives and legislative organization. A testable implication of the distributive theory of congressional organization is that candidate-centered electoral systems should result in legislatures with strong committees. Figure 1 depicts this view of the relationship between personal vote electoral systems and committee structures (Martin 2011). As the incentive to cultivate the personal vote increases, so too should the strength of committees in the legislature. The rationale is simple: In candidate-centered electoral systems, the legislature is organized in such a way as to privilege individual incumbent members to win votes via their legislative activity. These centrifugal pressures result in a strong committee system, allowing incumbents control policy of most interest to their constituents and distribute particularistic benefits. Indeed, Powell (2000, 34) noted the empirical correlation between strong committees and proportionally representative electoral systems. In contrast, where members are dependent on their party for re-election, the legislature will also be party-centered. For example, in a seminal contribution, Cox (1987) suggests that electoral reform in Britain resulted in procedural changes in the House of Commons. Specifically, less candidate-centered voting may associate

with greater cabinet control of the legislative agenda and deterioration of individual MPs parliamentary prerogatives and rights.

<Figure 1 around here>

Despite the logic and pellucidity of the argument linking legislative organization to electoral politics, not all candidate-centered electoral systems produce legislatures with strong committees. Looking at 55 legislatures, Taylor (2006) finds some evidence that personal vote electoral systems associate with decentralized legislative procedures (procedures which give power to rank-and-file members rather than concentrate power in the leadership). Yet the best predictor of the legislative procedures is chamber size and bicameral power: legislative procedures are most decentralized in small chambers and the powerful chamber in bicameral systems (Taylor 2006), suggesting that electoral incentives may not be what drives legislative organization. Martin (2011) finds no relationship between a legislature's committee system and the incentive to cultivate personal votes generated by the electoral system.

While candidate-centered electioneering produces strong committees in the United States, other candidate-centered systems, with the same or even stronger incentives to cultivate a personal vote, produces weak legislative committees in other countries. For example, under the Single Transferable Vote electoral system, Irish legislators face significant incentives to cultivate personal votes, not least because they must compete with co-partisans for the same seats in parliament. Yet, the Irish parliament has a long tradition of weak committees (André, Depauw, and Martin 2016). Arguments that this difference is due to the presidential nature of American

government and the parliamentary nature of other regimes become less compelling when we observe strong committees operating within parliamentary regimes and more generally when significant variation in committee system structures across legislatures operating under parliamentarism is detected (Mattson and Strøm 1995; Martin 2011).

Because an analysis of appointments to committees forms the backbone of empirical research on Congressional committees, scholars have also explored committee assignment patterns in other regimes to detect explanations of legislative organization. For example, Crisp et al. (2009) explore patterns of assignment to committees in Argentina, Costa Rica, and Venezuela. They find that procedures for selection of candidates and electoral rules contribute to explaining some but not most of the variation in patterns of assignments among national cases and individual careers. Raymond and Holt (2014) find that distributive and partisan models of legislative organization explain committee assignments in Canada. Research on the European Parliament noted that committee assignments tend to be proportionate to the party's plenary size, and parties thus influence and shaped the composition of committees (Bowler and Farrell 1995; McElroy 2006) – suggesting evidence favoring the party-cartel perspective. In contrast, (Whitaker 2001; 2011) noted that members are typically able to self-select assignments, based on members' own policy interests – suggesting evidence in favor of the informational perspective. Yordanova (2009) finds little evidence to support the partisan theory but noted that committees with distributive potential tend to consist of “high-demanding” preferential outliers – suggesting evidence in favor of the distributive explanation. In contrast, committees with no distributive authority tend to attract members with relevant expertise but no special interests – suggesting evidence in

favor of the informational perspective. As with the US Congress, research on committees in the EP currently brings us no closer to agreeing on a theory of legislative organization linking electoral considerations to members' attitude to committees (as measured through committee assignments). Ciftci, Forrest and Tekin (2008) explore the Turkish case, finding evidence that policy interests and seniority are influential, interpreted as evidence for both distributive and informational theories. The Danish case suggests assignments processes differ within the same chamber by party, leading Hansen (2010) to speculate that the entire process is potentially random. Looking at the German case, Gschwend and Zittel (2016) find that legislators with local ties are more likely to be assigned to committees that deliver pork to please local constituents. But the mode of election (single member district versus party list – Germany has a mixed-member electoral system) does not influence committee assignments.

We are left with something of a puzzle: In some cases, legislative organization can be traced to members' electoral incentives. In other instances, the link between legislative organization and the electoral system used to elect legislators is undetectable. Below I examine features of the political system which may condition or even break the relationship between electoral interests and legislative organization.

### **Conditioning the Electoral Effect**

To understand the relationship between electoral systems and legislative organization, it is necessary to recognize the consequences of what I call different *mechanisms to cultivate a personal vote* (MCPV). Legislators who need to cultivate personal votes have access to different

MCPVs, with the exact nature of these vote-gathering mechanisms varying from polity to polity. Differences in how legislators cultivate votes ultimately determines legislators' preferences over internal legislative structures.

To understand how MCPV may differ from polity to polity, it is worth contrasting how legislators in the United States and the United Kingdom cultivate personal votes. In the United States, incumbents rely on a number of mechanisms: these include pork barrel projects, undertaking casework for individual constituents or groups within the district and a range of other activities, such as arranging tours of federal buildings, nominating Congressional interns and attending public meetings and other events in their district. In the United Kingdom, parliamentarians do not typically secure or seek to secure pork-barrel projects for their district. Instead, British MPs devote considerable time to extra-legislative constituency service, which, according to Norris (1997), has four components: dealing with constituency casework, holding meetings or 'surgeries' with individual constituents, attending local party meetings, and attending other functions in their constituency. Notably absent from this list is work to secure pork spending projects for their district. Where the executive has budgetary authority and the sole right to introduce what are often referred to as money bills (bills with a spending element) it becomes impractical for individual legislators to cultivate personal votes by means of fiscal particularism. As others have demonstrated, British MPs, like legislators in many countries, have no or little opportunity to generate fiscal particularism for their districts (Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina 1997). As a result, British MPs rely on mostly extra-legislative mechanisms to enhance their reputation with constituents.



Existing research on electoral systems and legislative organization has tended to treat all personal vote gathering strategies as being the same in terms of consequence. Here, not only do we draw attention to the obvious differences between legislative particularism and extra-legislative parochialism (service to a district or constituent that is not based on securing public spending projects) but highlight the need to explore the consequences of different MCPVs, particularly as it applies to members' preferences over internal legislative organization.

Legislators elected under candidate-centered ballot structures are obligated by virtue of the electoral system to focus on cultivating personal votes, but the vote cultivating mechanism ultimately determines how the legislature will be organized. To clarify, let us think deductively about two different legislative settings, the first where individual legislators can target spending to their geographical districts and a second scenario where budgetary rules and the executive-legislative relationship make it impossible or unlikely that individual legislators will be able to impact spending plans. In the first, we would expect legislators to cultivate a personal vote by securing particularistic spending; in the second we would expect the members to be focused on providing alternative, non-fiscal, benefits to constituents. Where individual legislators can target particularistic benefit to their constituents, there is every reason to expect the logic of the distributive theory of legislative organization to hold. Where committees provide opportunities for reputation-building with constituents, and the electoral system is candidate-centered, legislators will have an incentive to participate in committee work. To ultimately ensure an incumbency advantage, legislators will organize a strong committee system where legislators'

property and distributive rights can be used to ingratiate them with their geographical constituency. The key point here, *à la* Shepsle and Weingast (1987), is that the relationship between cultivating personal votes and strong committees holds because individual members can use committees to enhance their personal vote.

Absent the opportunity for gaining credit 'back home' for legislative particularism, individual legislators will think more carefully about allocating their limited time and scarce resources to committee work, especially given that extra-legislative activity are more likely to enhance their opportunities for re-election. Focusing on constituency service leaves little time for legislators to perform non-parochial legislative roles such as active involvement in committee work. Frequently, legislative committees perform the role of assessing proposed legislation and holding the executive to account. In many legislative settings, committee work relates to issues of national policy which provides little opportunity for individual legislators to differentiate themselves in terms of constituent-interests and build personal reputations with individual constituents. A strong committee system may be electorally costly to a member who would be better served, in terms of enhancing their personal vote, focusing on local politics outside the legislature. In political systems where the MCPV is non-legislative and therefore more reliant on brokerage or other forms of direct voter contact, members have little incentive to sit on committees. On the contrary, committee work could actively interfere with personal vote gathering activities such as spending time in the constituency, meeting constituents or undertaking constituency casework. Ultimately, where the design of committee systems is determined by the legislature itself, and where exogenous rules mandate that committees

provide no avenue for particularistic spending credit-taking, we would not expect to see the emergence of strong committees.<sup>1</sup> Seeing no electoral benefit to committee work, members will shy away from having strong committees to which they would be expected to dedicate time, effort and other scarce resources.

This conditional perspective on legislative organization is displayed in Figure 2 and can be contrasted with the conventional perspective, as shown in Figure 1 above. In Figure 2, the relationship between ballot structure and committee system is *conditional* on the MCPV. In essence, ballot structure interacts with MCPV to determine the shape of legislative structures. Where the MCPV is fiscal particularism, or where fiscal particularism is an important tool to cultivate personal votes, and the electoral system is candidate-centered, we should expect to find strong committees. Indeed, as I have demonstrated elsewhere (Martin 2011), committee systems tend to be stronger, the more significant the personal vote, but only if legislators can use committee assignments to further geographically-targeted legislative particularism.

<Figure 2 around here>

---

<sup>1</sup> Research on legislative rules and executive-legislative rules highlights the presence of a constitutional or higher-law provision stipulating exclusive executive authority over fiscal matters in many countries (Wehner 2010). Given the number of veto-players needed to change constitutional/higher-law provisions, it seems fair to assume that, in most cases at least, individual legislators have little or no control over whether or not the political system permits legislative particularism.

Other features of a political system may also break or weaken the link between members' electoral incentives and how the legislature is organized. For example, virtually all legislatures endow certain members with extra authority and responsibilities (Cox 2006; Smith and Martin 2017). Researchers have been largely silent on the impact of "Chapter 2" (the allocation of mega-seats such as cabinet seats among legislators) on legislative behavior and organization. Allocation of mega-seats occurs by a variety of means. Party leader-centered allocation of mega-seats induces loyalty to the party leadership (as with party-centered electoral systems). In contrast, if the party leadership has no control over re-election (a candidate centered electoral system) or over the allocation of mega-seats (a seniority-based system) individual legislators are free to act within the legislative arena without the need to act in accordance with the preferences of their party leaders. What happens when incentives to cultivate mega-seats diverges from incentives to cultivate personal votes? Figure 3 presents the likely consequences of this for one of the most observed and researched aspects of legislator behavior – the degree to which legislators from the same party vote the same way on floor votes. Two of the four typologies provide clean-cut predictions for the level of unified party voting: Mega-seats filled through seniority, or those more generally free of the involvement of party leaders, combined with a candidate-centered electoral system should result in a decentralized. Party voting unity should only occur when parties are ideologically cohesive – otherwise individual members will roll-call on the basis of their own preferences or the preferences of their constituents, with little regard for the wishes of the party leadership. The leadership can neither give nor remove much that the individual legislator values. Empirically, the U.S. Congress, perhaps, approaches most

closely a reflection of this situation – the party leadership has little control over selection, election, and mega-seat allocation.

<Figure 3 around here>

The example of the Irish case provides a hard-test of the argument that mega-seats are of significance to how members behave within the legislative arena, and by extension their preferences over legislative organization. Irish legislators face competing principals: In order to gain re-election, incumbents must cultivate personal votes- the STV electoral system is considered the most candidate-centered electoral system used to elect a national legislature (André, Depauw, and Martin 2016b). Yet the Irish parliament is dominated by party leaders. Members have accepted highly centripetal legislative structures despite a personal-vote electoral environment. What explains such centralized legislative structures in the presence of a highly candidate-centered electoral environment? A possible explanation is the ability of party leaders to control promotion opportunities from the backbenches to the frontbench (Martin 2014b). A real motivation for incumbents is promotion to ministerial office. Thus, promotional prospects may be more important for influencing legislators' interests than what goes on at the ballot box. The Irish case arguably demonstrates that electoral interests do not necessarily translate into particular forms of legislative behavior or organization. Other political rules and institutions can condition this relationship. Thus personal vote electoral systems do not always give rise to decentralized legislatures, as the US case (and literature) would have us believe.

## Conclusion

Scholars have long been intrigued by the rules governing how legislators are elected. This is understandable, not least given the central role played by legislators and legislatures in most political systems. For similar reasons, scholars have expended considerable effort to explore how legislatures work and how they are organized. Indeed, intertemporal and cross-polity variation in how different legislative chambers organize themselves remains a central puzzle in legislative studies. In contrast, other organizations such as business firms tend to have far greater levels of similarity in how they organize, over time and across different countries.

Despite all that has been written about legislative organization, much remains to be done, not least in understanding better why some legislatures appear relatively better designed to meet the re-election needs of members. I conclude with some suggestions for future research.

As central as committee systems are to legislative organization, other rules and procedures greatly impact how a legislature operates. Scholars need to explore these other organizational attributes, and whether electoral incentives explain organizational features other than committee systems. For example, are resources such as research and political staff within the legislature more likely to be employed by and for individual members in candidate centered systems? In some legislatures, such resources are controlled and directed centrally; in other cases, staff associate with individual members. Similarly, is agenda setting and agenda control prerogatives more likely to be controlled by the party leadership in legislatures with party-centered electoral environments, as Cox (1987) hints at? While scholars have long studied

legislators voting (roll-call) behavior (Carey 2009; Depauw and Martin 2009), do the rules which govern floor votes associate with the electoral system used to elect members? Hug, Wegmann and Wüest (2015), for example, suggest that the transparency of the voting procedures is related to candidate selection rules. Thus, an entire world of legislative organization beyond committees remains to be explored in greater detail.

Second, and relatedly, the task of explaining legislative organization is complicated by lack of co-variation in various parts of the legislative structure. While this chapter has talked of decentralized and centralized forms of legislative organization, different organizational features within the same legislature can pull power and influence in different ways within a legislature. For example, Cheibub, Martin, and Rasch (2015) find that legislatures tend to have a more significant formal role in selecting the executive (in parliamentary systems) when the executive enjoys stronger agenda control powers. Thus, it may be inappropriate to look at any one feature of legislative organization and relate this to electoral politics. What is needed is a more nuanced measure of centralization and decentralization in legislative organization. Only then can we understand the electoral systems act as a centripetal or centrifugal force on legislative structures.

Third, we need to understand the historical foundations of legislative organization – in other words how do legislative structures come about and how do they change? Who are the actors designing legislative structures and what are the actual processes by which legislatures are organized and reorganized? Existing research has tended to focus on the motivations for

institutional design among incumbent legislators. The evolution of organization may involve more players than the legislators in that chamber - Sin (2014) finds that changes to the rules by the US House of Representatives reflects the bargaining context between the House, the Senate and the President.

Finally, scholars should leverage change in electoral institutions and change in legislative organization to better identify the causal mechanisms underlying change. When a country changes its electoral system, do we see change to how the legislature is organized? If so, can we relate change in legislative organization to change in the electoral system? This may be a difficult task. For example, shifting to a more proportional system may be associated with a decentralization of power in the legislature but this decentralization of power may arise from a change to the form of government rather than the electoral incentives of incumbents. André, Depauw, and Martin (2016b) suggest that the shift from single party cabinets to coalition cabinets motivated a strengthening of the committee systems in the Irish parliament. A more fragmented party system and resultant need to build a coalition, as distinct from single party - government may be the real cause of legislative re-organization in the aftermath of electoral system change.

As this chapter has demonstrated, legislators' electoral motivations constitute just one explanation of legislative organization. Models suggesting the electoral basis of legislative institutions are, or at least were, a central tenet of research on American political institutions and political development. Members' electoral needs also appear to influence legislative



organization in other settings. Candidate-centered electoral systems (such as open-list proportional relationship) incentivize legislators to construct a legislature with decentralized organizational structures. This decentralization of power and influence permits incumbents to build personal reputations with constituents which ultimately aids their reelection. In contrast, party entered electoral environments (such as closed-list proportional representation) induces party-centered legislatures, with the party leadership controlling the legislative agenda and using legislative organization to shape the party label and party reputation in the electoral arena.

Yet, the empirical relationship between electoral incentives and legislative organization is not a perfect one. For one thing, some political systems have candidate centered elections but party-dominated legislative structures (for example, Ireland). Sieberer et al. (2016) find that changes to standing orders – the rules dictating legislative organization - are far more common than changes in electoral rules in Europe, suggesting that electoral rules alone can't explain legislative reorganization. As this chapter has discussed, the uncoupling of legislative organization from electoral institutions may be because other incentives trump member's electoral incentives. Thus, parties may be able to cartelize the allocation of prized offices to dull the effect of electoral rules on legislators' preferences. Moreover, rules governing executive-legislative relations may privilege the executive to the degree that decentralized legislative structures do not allow individual legislators to cultivate personal votes. For example, committee work absent the ability to use committees to buy votes may be of little interest to legislators, resulting in little incentive to delegate decision making away from the plenary.

## References

- Alemán, E. 2015. "Legislative Organization and Outcomes," in J. Gandhi and R. Ruiz-Rufino (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Comparative Political Institutions*. Abingdon: Routledge. pp. 145-161.
- Ames, B. 1995. "Electoral Rules, Constituency Pressures, and Pork Barrel: Bases of Voting in the Brazilian Congress." *Journal of Politics* 57(2): 324-343.
- André, A., S. Depauw, and S. Martin. 2016a. "The classification of electoral systems: Bringing legislators back in." *Electoral Studies* 42: 42-53.
- André, A., S. Depauw, and S. Martin. 2016b. "Trust Is Good, Control Is Better" Multiparty Government and Legislative Organization." *Political Research Quarterly* 69(1)" 108-120.
- Arrow, K. J. 1951. *Social Choice and Individual Values*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Baron, D.P. and Ferejohn, J.A., 1989. "Bargaining in Legislatures." *American Political Science Review* 83(04): 1181-1206.
- Berry, C. R., and A. Fowler. 2016. "Cardinals or Clerics? Congressional Committees and the Distribution of Pork." *American Journal of Political Science* 60 (3): 692-708.

Bowler, S. and Farrell, D. M. 1995. The Organizing of the European Parliament: Committees, Specialization and Co-ordination. *British Journal of Political Science* 25: 219-43.

Cain, B. E., J. Ferejohn, and M. Fiorina. 1987. *The Personal Vote: Constituency Service and Electoral Independence*. Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press.

Carey, J. M. 2009. *Legislative Voting & Accountability*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cheibub, J. A., S. Martin, and B. E. Rasch. 2015. "Government selection and executive powers: Constitutional design in parliamentary democracies." *West European Politics* 38(5): 969-996.

Carey, J. M., and M. S. Shugart. 1995. "Incentives to Cultivate a Personal Vote: A Rank Ordering of Electoral Formulas." *Electoral Studies* 14(4): 417-39.

Ciftci, S., Forrest, W. and Tekin, Y. 2008. "Committee Assignments in a Nascent Party System: The Case of the Turkish Grand National Assembly." *International Political Science Review* 29: 303-24.

Cox, G. W. 2006. "The Organization of Democratic Legislatures", In: B. R. Weingast and D. A. Wittman eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Economy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cox, G. W. 1987. *The Efficient Secret: The cabinet and the development of political parties in Victorian England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cox, G. W. and McCubbins, M. D. 1993. *Legislative Leviathan*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Crisp, B. F., Escobar-Lemmon, M. C., Jones, B. S., Jones, M. P. and Taylor-Robinson, M. M. 2009. "The Electoral Connection and Legislative Committees." *The Journal of Legislative Studies* 15: 35-52.

Depauw, S., and S. Martin. 2009. "Legislative Party Discipline and Cohesion in Comparative Perspective." In *Intra-Party Politics and Coalition Governments in Parliamentary Democracies*, ed. Giannetti, Daniela and Kenneth Benoit. London: Routledge, 103-120.

Evans, D. 2004. *Greasing the Wheels: Using Pork Barrel Projects to Build Majority Coalitions in Congress*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Fenno, R. F. (1978) *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*, Boston: Little, Brown.

Gilligan, T. W. and Krehbiel, K. 1987. "Collective Decision-Making and Standing Committees: An Informational Rationale for Restrictive Amendment Procedures." *Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 3: 287-335.

Gilligan, T. W. and Krehbiel, K. 1990. "Organization of Informative Committees by a Rational Legislature." *American Journal of Political Science* 34: 531-64.

Gschwend, T. and Zittel, T., 2016. "Who brings home the pork? Parties and the role of localness in committee assignments in mixed-member proportional systems." *Party Politics*, DOI: 10.1177/1354068816678884.

Hansen, M. E. 2010. "Committee Assignment Politics in the Danish Folketing." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 33: 381-401.

Hansen, M. E. 2011. A Random Process? Committee Assignments in Dáil Éireann. *Irish Political Studies*, 26: 345-60.

Hug, S., S. Wegmann, and R. Wüest. 2015. "Parliamentary voting procedures in comparison." *West European Politics* 38(5): 940-968.

Katz, J. N. and Sala, B. R. 1996. "Careerism, Committee Assignments, and the Electoral Connection." *American Political Science Review* 90: 21-33.

Krehbiel, K. 1991. *Information and Legislative Organization*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Martin, S. 2014. "Committees" in S. Martin, T. Saalfeld and K. W. Strøm, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 352-370.

Martin, S., 2014b. "Why electoral systems don't always matter: The impact of 'mega-seats' on legislative behaviour in Ireland." *Party Politics* 20(3): 467-479.

Martin, S., 2011. "Electoral institutions, the personal vote, and legislative organization." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 36(3): 39-361.

Martin, S., T. Saalfeld, and K. W. Strøm, eds. 2014. *The Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McElroy, G. 2006. "Committee Representation in the European Parliament." *European Union Politics* 7: 5-29.

Mattson, I., and K. Strøm. 1995. "Parliamentary Committees." In *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, ed. H. Döring. Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 249-307.

Mayhew, D. 1974. *The Electoral Connection*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Miller, W. E., and D. E. Stokes. 1963. "Constituency Influence in the Congress." *American Political Science Review* 57: 45-56.

Norris, P. 1997. "The Puzzle of Constituency Service." *Journal of Legislative Studies* 3(2): 29-49

Raymond, C. and Holt, J. 2014. "Due North? Do American Theories of Legislative Committees Apply to Canada?" *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 20(2):174-192.

Rickard, S. J. 2012. "A Non-Tariff Protectionist Bias in Majoritarian Politics: Government Subsidies and Electoral Institutions." *International Studies Quarterly* 56(4): 777-785

Shepsle, K. A. 1978. *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Committee Assignments in the Modern House*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shepsle, K. A. and Weingast, B. R. 1987. "The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power." *American Political Science Review* 81: 85-104.

Sieberer, U., P. Meißner, J. F. Keh, and W. C. Müller. 2016. "Mapping and Explaining Parliamentary Rule Changes in Europe: A Research Program." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 41(1): 61-88.

Sin, G. 2014. *Separation of Powers and Legislative Organization*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Smith, D. M., and Martin, S. 2017. "Political Dynasties and the Selection of Cabinet Ministers." *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 42 (1): 131-165.

Taylor, A. J. 2006. "Size, power, and electoral systems: Exogenous determinants of legislative procedural choice." *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 31(3): 323-345.

Weingast, B. R., and W. J. Marshall. 1988. "The industrial organization of Congress; or, why legislatures, like firms, are not organized as markets." *The Journal of Political Economy* 96(1): 132-163.

Wehner, J. 2010. *Legislatures and the Budget Process: The Myth of Fiscal Control*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Whitaker, R. 2001. "Party Control in a Committee-Based Legislature? The Case of the European Parliament." *Journal of Legislative Studies* 7: 63-88.

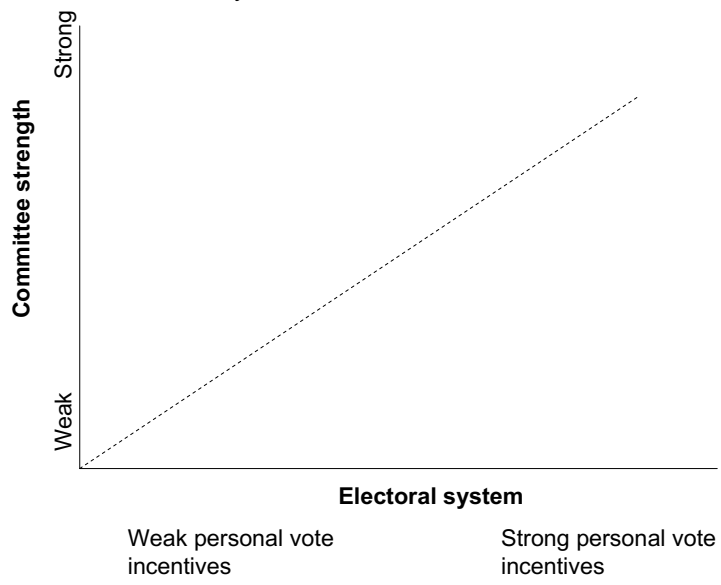
Whitaker, R. 2011. *The European Parliament's Committees: National Party Influence and Legislative Empowerment*. Abingdon: Routledge.



Zittel, T., und E. Uslaner. 2009. "Comparative Legislative Behavior." 392–408 in: R. E. Goodin (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

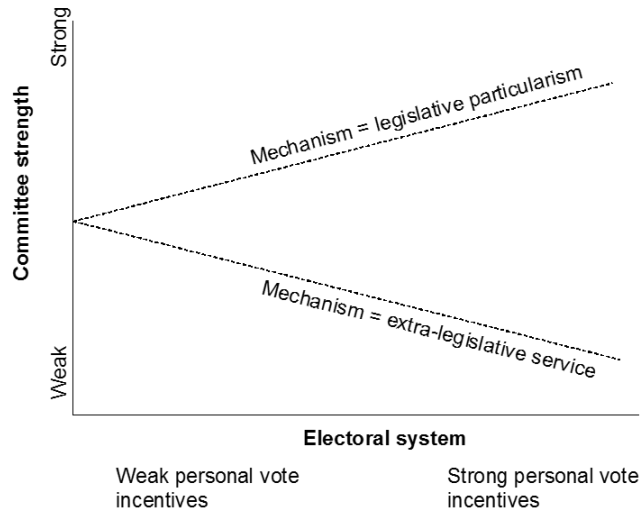
Zubek, R. 2015. "Legislative Organisation and its Determinants in European Parliamentary Democracies." *West European Politics* 38(5): 933-939.

Figure 1: Conventional Relationship between Ballot Structure and Committee System



Source: Martin (2011)

Figure 2: The Interactive Effect of Mechanism to Cultivate a Personal Vote on the Relationship between Ballot Structure and Committee System



Source: Martin (2011)

Figure 3: Complementary or Competing Impact of the Electoral System and Mega-Seat Allocation System on Incentives for Unified Party Voting

**Mega-Seat Allocation**

		Party-centred	Other (e.g., seniority)
Electoral System	Party-centred	Strong discipline, unified party voting (example, Norway)	Level of voting unity reflect relative significance of seat to mega-seat (example, The European Parliament)
	Candidate-centred	Level of voting unity reflect relative significance of seat to mega-seat (example, Ireland)	Little discipline, low levels of party voting unity (example, US Congress)

Source: Martin (2014)