THE *FUTURE* OF PARLIAMENTARY AND LEGISLATIVE STUDIES

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Summary:

In this article, Emma Crewe, Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson and Shane Martin discuss the future of parliamentary and legislative studies. The exchange is based on a Roundtable on the Past, Present and Future of Parliamentary Studies, which was held online on 9th June 2021 as part of the Annual Conference of the UK Political Studies Association's Parliaments Specialist Group.

Key words:

Legislative studies; Parliamentary studies; Sub-discipline;

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1. Emma Crewe

In the coming years legislative scholars may respond to politicians' ability or failure to tackle global and national breakdowns that have intensified since the turn of the millennium: as examples, violence, the climate emergency, displacement, data manipulation and further pandemics. As the world becomes more complex, both wilder but more regulated in different areas, perhaps academics will be forced into more critical coalitions, networks and movements – including with journalists, lawyers, social media influencers and reflective politicians – in a bid to help sort out the confusion. This may require even more multi-disciplinary collaboration, imaginative methods, and creative communication than in the past, thinking anew about how, who, what, and where to research and engage. The topics studied may increasingly bend towards crises as well, especially as we attempt to recover from Covid-19. As January 2021 witnessed an insurrection in the US Congress, and October 2021 the second UK MP being murdered in recent times while doing his constituency work, and conflicts of different kinds rage across the world, it may be that the links between political engagement, violence and peace will become central to parliamentary and legislative studies. Mulugeta's innovative experiments with creating digital platforms for MPs in Ethiopia to engage with their constituents in moderated ways may have relevance for any parliament.[1] Perhaps all legislative scholars will become more policy-oriented, evaluating progress made by parliaments to legislate, and encourage governments to take action, to protect people, the environment and democracy more successfully?

While this may generate creative work, if parliamentary and legislative studies is forced into an exclusively evaluative and problem-solving space, that might be over-constraining. There are promising signs of other possibilities in parliamentary and legislative studies if the world can afford it. The new disciplines coming into parliament could grow in capacity and influence and expand our understanding of neglected aspects of democracy. Scholars from new disciplines are more likely to revolutionise our thinking if they have the space to research not only known problems, but phenomenological questions about political work, space, time and relationships for the sake of knowledge. Of course, this too benefits the world in the longer-term, as knowledge production inspired by curiosity in the first instance can sometimes be more transformative in the fullness of time than narrowly impact-driven research. We should protect that space for scholars within the academy and the funding environment. This is especially true in parts of the world that are conceived of as 'development states' where the funding available to scholars is strongly skewed towards the Sustainable Development Goals. Scholars in the Global South will create more significant scholarship if they are funded to produce knowledge that is intellectually important as well as utilitarian.

The most recent new disciplines that already seem set to expand their presence and influence include architecture, linguistics, psychologists, as well as digital and management scholars. Sophia Psarra, an architect based at University College London, hosted an international conference on parliaments, space and architecture in 2020 and plans research with ethnographers, political scientists and architects.[2] This seems especially timely given the various parliamentary building and restoration programmes (e.g., in Australia, India and the UK) but also the challenges of balancing the need for both security and accessibility. We might see more of linguists, like UK scholar Silvia Shaw who has written about how gender inequalities are reproduced through speech and language in Westminster and the UK devolved assemblies (2020). Psychologists or psychotherapists might follow Nicholas Sarra into parliament to understand how emotions are entangled with politics. His analysis of how the work of politicians is an emotional magnification of the way people interact in all organisations (Crewe and

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[1] Mulugeta's experiments with creating digital platforms for MPs to engage with their constituents in moderated ways, https://grnpp.org/mercy/, accessed 18 October 2021.

[2] https://www.parliamentbuildings.org.uk/abstracts/spatial-form-and-parliament-organisation/, accessed 17 October 2021.

Sarra 2019, 2021) paves the way for others to look comparatively at mental health, relationships and conflict in parliaments, legislatures and assemblies at all levels of political worlds.

Surely most likely of all, organisational and management studies scholars might take a greater interest in what goes on in the political institutions at the heart of our democracies. Herein lies a risk. If management scholars attempt to fix parliaments in mimicry of the pervasive assumptions of business school and auditing firms – writing a Job Description (JD) for MPs; introducing risk registers, visioning and other symbols of supposed business efficiency; or strengthening parliaments even when democracy is weak (just to improve policy-makers' capacity to subject their populations to authoritarianism) – then trouble could ensue. As Australian scholar, Ross Donohue, explains from a human resources perspective, even a JD for MPs presents difficulties because they tend to disagree about what their jobs entail (2016: 15) – so how could they be codified and who would have the democratic legitimacy to do so? On the other hand, there is management scholarship that shows us more creative possibilities for the future. Sabrina Siebert's research, based partly on 'walking interviews' with MPs and officials in the UK and Scottish Parliament, raises important questions about duty of care to staff, how intimidating versus inclusive buildings can be with effects on political engagement, and how space can become a political battleground.[3]

Not as likely but perhaps more urgently, I would suggest that parliamentary and legislative studies needs to get more philosophical; we need to rethink assumptions, methods and theories to catch up with our fast-changing, ever more inter-connected world. We might usefully ask what we think we know, what we think we don't know, and how can we inquire to the known unknowns and even the unknown unknowns, as the US politician Donald Rumsfeld put it. Unsurprisingly, as an anthropologist, it seems to me that anthropology – a discipline that Tim Ingold (2014) describes as philosophy but with the people still in – could be useful to parliamentary and legislative studies in probing some of these epistemological questions. By this I mean that it offers more than ethnography. Most political scientists know of anthropology as the discipline that uses ethnographical research methods to get under the skin of parliaments and parliamentarians. Anthropologists have offered new methods for studying everyday relations, practices and meaning-making in parliaments; I have already mentioned how this has had an influence on contemporary political science (see the article on the present in this issue). I anticipate a flourishing of ethnographies partly because this embedded approach allows scholars to probe questions that are difficult to answer via surveys, experiments or observation alone. When you face taken-for-granted culture and symbolism, rapid change or serious contradictions, and/or intense contestation in viewpoints (which is most of the time in politics), then the agility and range of ethnography can be the most appropriate research methodology. But my point here is rather different: in the future, parliamentary and legislative studies might go beyond merely adopting ethnographic methods to adopting anthropological theoretical sensibilities.

Gillian Tett, one of the few financial journalists to anticipate the financial crash, explains that anthropology 'is an intellectual framework that enables you to see around corners, spot what is hidden in plain sight, gain empathy for others, and fresh insight on problems' (2021: xii). This is about more than method in the sense of activity (interviewing, observing, counting, analysing text etc) and requires a different way of thinking. Trained as an anthropologist, she argues it starts at the micro-level, a worm's-eye view, with an intense gaze on groups of people to fathom what is going on but then draws broader conclusions by taking the bird's-eye view (2021: 6). How you make sense of the data you collect, and the meaning you derive from it in collaboration with others, is as important to anthropology as the mean of acquisition. The way she realised that the financial world had troubles brewing by the middle of the 2000s was by noticing and worrying about received wisdoms. In around 2005 financiers insisted that it was not a problem that some of the new financial instruments were so complex that outsiders couldn't understand them, or that their value was difficult to pin down, on the grounds that they were *designed* to reduce risk (2021: 88-89). This rang various alarm bells for Tett, one being that rhetoric is often starkly opposed to reality – a common finding for anthropologists (and other kinds of philosophers of course). Other journalists colluded in contrast to Tett, telling good stories but failing to challenge the financiers' assumptions or, as Alan Greenspan later confessed to Congress, there was a flaw in their thinking (2021: 94). In the future I predict that what anthropologists have done in other spheres (by Gillian Tett in finance, by David Mosse [2005] and others in international development, by Laura Bear et al. in relation to Covid),[4] they may do in parliamentary studies. I anticipate younger anthropologists arriving with a greater understanding of violence, digital networks, financial flows and data manipulation and transforming how we think about what goes in parliaments and the networks created within them but also with wider society.

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[3] http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/223191/1/223191.pdf, accessed 17 October 2021.

This begs the question, what are the received wisdoms circulating between politicians that go unnoticed, or what Bourdieu calls 'silent traditions' that survive through complicity (1977: 167), and deserve to be probed by parliamentary and legislative studies in the future? Some are shared within groups of politicians. The majority of politicians globally seem to believe that the climate emergency will be sorted out in the fullness of time, in part by technology and adjusting patterns of consumption, while a tiny minority are in a state of panic sufficient to propel drastic action. What politicians seem to be reflecting less about is the likely consequences of their inaction – the punitive actions that citizens may take if transformation is not forthcoming in the near future. For some decades we have assumed that violence can usually be contained by the state in apparently stable democracies but the consequences of Brexit, Trump, Bolsanaro, Putin, and Modi are surely shaking our confidence.

Other former certainties that are even more widely held within parliaments are wobbling: that society progress towards a more evolved state and 'modernity' is a beneficial aspiration even if some traditions might be preserved along the way; that artificial intelligence can be regulated in a similar way to technological developments of the past; and that the majority will abide by societal codes of ethics and the rule of law because it is in their interests. Maybe the moral certainties expected of politicians in their manifestoes, their media interviews and their engagement on digital media may decline. If they could express more doubt, and recognise ambiguity and plurality of causes, as counselled by John Dewey (1938), that could filter down into media coverage and parliamentary and legislative studies. Ironically, it may be that if parliamentary and legislative studies embraced a greater level of uncertainty too, we might contribute to a safer world.

2. Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson

Emma's expectation that parliamentary and legislative studies will become more inclusive of disciplines beyond political science is exciting. Such new perspectives and approaches in research will add to our understanding of how parliaments and MPs do their work and why there are differences across some countries, but also why there are surprisingly few differences across others. I look forward to this broadening of the literature.

I also support Emma's call for research that engages more in understanding challenges politicians face in addressing national and international problems; crises such as COVID, global warming and also the related welfare needs they are producing. These important questions will expand the "applied" side of parliamentary and legislative studies and increase the relevance of the field and of political science outside of the academy, which is of increasing importance for universities. These are also questions for which parliamentary and legislative studies already has useful tools. For example, a long-standing topic in parliamentary and legislative studies is what types of activities are rational for career-seeking MPs: if they break with their party in order to defend constituent interests will they be punished by their party or rewarded by voters (studied with experiments about voter reaction to rebels as noted above, or recent work examining when Mexican parties will nominate candidates for the Congress who are not loyalists, but expected to be good at winning votes and hence the seat for the party [Ascencio and Kerevel 2021])? Questions such as the implications for a legislator's political career of taking a strong stand on controversial topics like how to address climate change, or who should pay for new health care programs, how the costs and benefits to an MP of doing such work are affected by ballot type, party gatekeeping ability, or chamber rules of procedure – fit well into long established streams of research in parliamentary and legislative studies. The new part is the issues that are the focus of the research, but we can at least begin the study building on existing theory of institutional incentives.

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[4] https://www.lse.ac.uk/anthropology/assets/documents/research/Covid-and-Care/ARighttoCare-CovidandCare-Final-2310.pdf, accessed 18 October 2021.

Policy, not only examining crisis topics but also more ordinary issues of policy, should be expanded in parliamentary and legislative studies. One of the topics on my wish list for the future of parliamentary and legislative studies is expansion of research about the policy implications of how parliaments and legislatures work. The internal working of parliaments and legislatures, and how electoral rules shape behaviours are well established topics for research, but parliamentary and legislative studies would benefit from more work that investigates the *policy implications* of different types of institutional design, as well as the policy implications (or policy limitations) created by the career building incentives of MPs (e.g., on government spending, provision of welfare benefits, anti-crime and criminal rehabilitation programs). How do incentives for legislators that are created by their institutional environment hinder (or possibly in some cases help) government from addressing long-term problems such as climate change, where the costs of developing and transitioning to new forms of energy have to be paid up front, but the benefits of slowing or stopping global warming go to future generations? Similarly, regarding the need for childcare, welfare and education programs, which have up-front costs but benefits that will be received in the longer-term as those children move into the workforce, how do institutional incentives, or disincentives, for legislators impact the ability of government to address those needs? This is an area of research that has started (see the special issue of Legislative Studies Quarterly 2021 vol.46 issue 1; also Betz, Fortunato and O'Brien 2021). As Fortunato writes in his introduction to the special issue, the choices legislatures make about how they are organized internally, and the choices individual legislators make about their agenda and co-authorship strategies, "determine a set of observable outcomes that shape the lived experience of the governed, and we have spent comparatively little time and energy studying these outcomes" with the consequence that scholars in other fields such as economics, sociology and public policy have filled the void (2001:4). Policy, or the lack of policy development, is a topic that should be a priority for parliamentary and legislative scholars.

Another topic that I believe needs more attention in parliamentary and legislative studies is how different types of actors within parliaments and legislatures, or government more broadly, are able to work. Are new types of actors limited in their ability to do their job by the way the institution functions, to protect interests of the groups in society that have traditionally had control of government? Women are winning more seats in (some) legislatures. More legislators from race/ethnic groups that historically have been excluded from politics are being elected in (some) legislatures. Social class diversity within legislatures is an under-studied topic (but see Barnes, Kerevel and Saxton n.d.). Greater diversity in the membership of legislatures, so citizens see officials who look like them in government, may help to address the declining trust in legislative institutions that plagues many democracies. But enhanced descriptive representation is unlikely to boost trust in the legislature if it does not produce substantive representation. Consequently, parliamentary and legislative studies should examine whether "new types" of MPs have access to the venues within the legislature where policy is made or modified, and whether the new policy proposals they are expected to bring to government can make it through the many decision gates of the legislative process. Alternatively, are new types of legislators expected to be "seen but not heard" at least until they acquire seniority in the chamber or within their party? Legislators from groups in society that have historically been excluded from politics may not have access to the powerful committees and leadership posts within the legislature, or the informal venues where policy decisions are made. In addition, research finds that women legislators face intimidation and in some cases violence for doing their job (e.g., Bjarnegård and Zetterberg forthcoming). As Annesley and Gains (2010: 910) wrote about the challenges faced by feminist politicians in the UK, the ability of a feminist minister to make policy changes depends on "the resources and relationships placed at their disposal by the gendered core executive." Parallel questions need to be explored for legislators who bring novel policy topics to their chamber.

The implications of increasing diversity within legislatures also relate to the study of policy outputs. How far can new types of legislators push policy change before MPs who have traditionally had power utilize chamber rules and other measures to stop policy change that is threatening to their group? Similar questions should be asked regarding new types of cabinet ministers, prime ministers and presidents. If a new type of official is elected, or a new party wins a significant block of seats after campaigning on major policy change, can the politician or party actually get those new policies adopted, or will the legislature stymie their work? Of course, no politician, even a president or PM is likely to be able to do everything he or she campaigned about, and policymaking requires compromise. But are new types of presidents, prime ministers, cabinet ministers, or MPs challenged more vigorously by the legislature (more aggressive questions, more likely to be sanctioned, greater use of delaying tactics)? The Republican leadership in both chambers of the U.S. Congress went to great lengths to slow down or stop President Obama's policy agenda. While this could be accepted as standard practice by the opposition party, it is also possible that the harshness of the attack was because President Obama was viewed as more threatening because he was the first African-American president. In this vein, research should explore whether norms of decorum are maintained, or relaxed, in dealings with more diverse MPs or cabinet ministers during debates, parliamentary questions, or when ministers testify before parliamentary and legislative committees.

A third topic on my future wish list is rigorous concern for "changepoints" in how the legislature, or legislative-executive relations operate (see Hollibaugh and Rothenberg 2021 for a clear example). With my focus on Latin American legislatures, I have long envied the U.S. Congress and British Parliament scholars their really long time-stream of data. It is exciting for study of Latin American legislatures that democratic regimes have lasted longer so far in the Third Wave than in past democratic periods, so we now have long enough time serial data for asking more types of research question with more rigorous empirical tests. But that time stream raises the question of whether we should group all of those years, or legislative terms in a democratic regime together. The answer I suspect is no, as newly installed democracies typically face great uncertainty about the rules of the game. For example, political actors often self-censor in the initial years of a new democratic regime because they do not want to push too hard and prompt the military to retake control. Additionally, politicians have to learn how to campaign and build a political career when they can be confident that there is a political future even if their party loses control in one election. In essence, the ability of institutions to make behaviours predictable, and to facilitate coordination takes time experiencing those institutions. The early years of a new regime may be quite different than later years, once democratic rules of the game, and rules and informal norms of operation within the legislature are established. But when does that "transition" period end? Systematic analysis of change points can help us to measure when behaviours become predictable and a new era of stability is in place.

Another possible change point that may divide the time stream of a legislature is dramatic change in the party system. If traditional parties lose their dominance and the party system becomes sufficiently fragmented that single-party governments are no longer feasible, executives, chamber leaders, and backbenchers may have to change their strategies for achieving policy goals. But they may not update quickly to the new setting as they may hope it is not permanent. For example, in Costa Rica prior to the 1990s presidents typically had a majority in the Legislative Assembly or could gain a few more votes by working with a small "party for hire" (Kellam 2015). But as the seat share of big parties shrank, and the effective number of parties increased, presidents persisted in forming single party governments, the president's party could not always form a coalition to hold the leadership posts in the Assembly, gridlock became the norm and a major frustration for the public, lowering satisfaction with institutions. Yet it was not until 2018 that a president formed a coalition cabinet. Another possible change point is when a country changes its electoral rules. Methodologically, ignoring the existence of eras may distort findings. Acknowledging, and carefully assessing the timing of distinct eras could create opportunities for analysis of more than one case within the same legislature.

In sum, there are exciting opportunities for new types of research within parliamentary and legislative studies. We should expand work addressing questions prompted by changing times in politics, new actors, and serious policy problems that make citizens question their trust in legislators and their legislature.

3. Shane Martin

I really enjoyed reading Emma's and Michelle's thoughts and perspectives on the future of parliamentary and legislative studies, and there is much with which I agree. Let me start by discussing these, before turning to some of my own thoughts.

I agree entirely with Emma about the need for more multi-disciplinary research in parliamentary and legislative studies, and indeed in University-led knowledge creation more generally. The fundamental questions we ask in parliamentary and legislative studies (and political science more generally) would benefit from multidisciplinary team-based research. This includes a need to reconnect sub-disciplines within political science, as well as build bridges across disciplines (Hay 2010). I can see clear benefits of having anthropologists, cognitive scientists, computer science, sociologists, and psychologists to name but five other disciplines helping with the research questions I am most interested in formulating and answering. But, of course, this is easier said than done. University administrators long for trans-disciplinary research, perhaps even investing funding in cross-campus initiatives. I'd be delighted to be proved wrong, but these rarely seem to have provided a good return on investment. And arguably some of our best Universities, via the college system, are best placed to foster inter disciplinary research, but even at places like Oxford and Cambridge, multidisciplinary research remains the exception rather than the rule. Grant funders will certainly provide one avenue to encourage and foster inter-disciplinary research and a shift towards multidisciplinary researchers in large grants may provide the needed impetus. Still, all multidisciplinary teams face a problem: where to publish the research. Disciplines remain silos, and this is no less the case in political science, with the discipline preferring to read about politics in political science journals, and ideally in the best political science journals, however measured. Monographs provide a potential solution, but these are less common in other disciplines, especially in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

I also agree with Emma's point about the need for parliamentary and legislative studies to have impact beyond the narrow confines of the academic community. UK-based scholars will be all too familiar with the need to demonstrate impact for the Research Assessment exercises – where individuals or groups develop and report as a case study how their research has had a real-world impact (as distinct from academic impact measured through citations). At my own institution, I had the dubious pleasure of generating one such case – focused on the introduction and evolution of pre-legislative scrutiny in the Irish parliament. For non-UK readers, I'll note that impact in the UK typically involves 'translating' your research into a real-world setting or, as in my case, co-producing research with a non-academic partner, and then applying the recommendations of this research. It is not simply about communicating research, as we do via blogs or journalism. But beyond the relatively narrow and incentive-inducing confines of the UK system, the wider lessons are clear: it is good for academics who study parliaments and legislatures to engage with them, and not just as part of the research generation (for example, data collection) process. Controversy in the United States over the value of political science in the National Science Foundation should be a wakeup call that as social scientists we have to justify our time and resources, and showing how our research travels and has significance beyond our discipline and the students we teach is one important way. All colleagues in all countries would do well to reflect on terms such as (non-academic) impact, engagement, co-production, and knowledge exchange. And these projects are and can be very rewarding.

I also welcome Emma's and Michelle's suggestion that parliamentary and legislative studies pay more attention to policy outcomes. As suggested, we have done relatively well as a discipline at understanding what legislators do, and why, but we know relatively little about the ultimate policy consequences of this. I look with admiration and more than a hint of jealousy at other parts of the political science discipline who seek to explain fundamental outcomes such as quality of life or even narrower outcomes such as budget deficits. Political economists in particular appear to excel at such attempts. But even scholars of electoral systems have made great progress in using electoral systems to explain policy outcomes – even though electoral systems are typically understood as no more than the means by which votes in an election are translated into seats in the legislature. The point here is that in such stories of electoral systems effects, the legislature remains largely a black box – unexplored and certainly under-theorised. And here I would also echo Michelle's point that we need to redouble our efforts to study descriptive and substantive representation, and perhaps above all else explore further the consequences of a lack of diversity and inclusiveness within legislatures for citizens without. Here, and reflecting societal concerns, scholars rightly need to focus on demographic characteristics such as gender, gender identity, race and ethnicity, but also socio-economic class, and the intersectionality of discrimination and under-representation. Living in the United Kingdom, I am struck by how the leadership of the major parliamentary parties tend to be white, middle aged+ men who come from exceptionally privileged backgrounds.

When co-editing the *Oxford Handbook of Legislative Studies* a decade ago, I was struck by a few things, which I think remain as problematic today as it was then. Above all else, and echoing the thoughts of Emma and Michelle, parliamentary and legislative studies is still very much a region-dominated sub-field. By this I mean we tend to write in and for a specific geographical area of the world. Scholars of the US Congress can be criticised for rarely looking outside Washington DC to US state legislatures let alone other national legislatures. But us Europeans are often little better, although admittedly more in tune with, and often intense admirers of, US Congressional studies. We rarely seek to extend our research to southern America, Africa, or Asia. I guess what I would like to see then is a global parliamentary and legislative studies, where comparative work is *truly* comparative. Returning again to a comparison with electoral studies scholars, I'm impressed how their research is often global, including how they produce comparable data spanning all regions of the world. In contrast, parliamentary and legislative studies abounds with country-specific or region-specific datasets but rarely do we find cross-region datasets beyond rudimentary information such as the number of chambers or number of members. So, my appeal is simple: let us make parliamentary and legislative studies more global. One day perhaps, a political economist will have some variable on the organisation of the legislature which they will be able to plug into their regression model, just as they do for electoral systems (eg PR v non-PR electoral systems) today. I appreciate non-reductionists will cry at such a call.

But let me conclude by returning to parliamentary and legislative studies in political science and perhaps the particular (or not so particular) challenges we face. As I remind my colleagues here at Essex when we are hiring or promoting, what constitutes good political science is a *social construct* – marginally ironic for someone who identified as first and foremost a rational choice scholar. As parliamentary and legislative scholars we play a part in shaping that construct, but we are ultimately as bound to it as any other member of the discipline. And the study of politics has always evolved and continues to evolve. "Good" political science in 2021 looks very different from "good" political science in 1999. Key fault-lines used to be between quantitative versus qualitative scholars, inductive-minded versus deductive-minded scholars, and perhaps empiricists versus philosophers or formal modellers. Today, we are a decade into the causal identification revolution and it seems to be that a – perhaps the – new fault line is between empiricists who rely on observational data versus scholars who rely on generating or exploiting some form of experimental data. The latter rejoice understandably in the ability to move beyond correlations, although potentially through the use of big data and data science. And certainly, lab experiments and survey experiments will continue to play an important role in parliamentary and legislative studies, as well as statistical techniques such as difference-in-differences estimation strategy. And we will continue to debate the ethics of survey experiments conducted on political elites, or conducting field experiments to study how voters respond to fiscal particularism, to mention but one topic.

I'm now, if (hopefully) temporarily more an administrator than researcher or teacher. But what I see from this is the need for parliamentary and legislative studies to embrace multi-disciplinary research, the big challenges facing society, engagement, but doing all this while remaining at the heart of whatever discipline we belong to – shaping the discipline and growing the subfield in terms of quality publications and students wanting to learn about and themselves study parliaments. I see the changing fortunes of other disciplines, particularly in the humanities, and this reminds me of the need for my own discipline, and my subfield, to remain cutting-edge and consumer focused, whoever that consumer is – student, legislative organization, grant funder, peers (i.e. other parts of the discipline) or even wider society.

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