How Much Room for Manoeuvre? - An Analysis of Individual Committee Members of the Bundestag, the Tweede Kamer and Dáil Éireann

Tim A. Mickler
Department of Political Science, Leiden University, the Netherlands


Please do not cite or circulate without authors’ permission

Abstract Objective: In this paper, I investigate the relationship of individual committee members with other MPs in three legislatures with strong parliamentary party groups (PPGs) (Bundestag, Tweede Kamer and Dáil Éireann). Parliamentary committees are, next to PPGs, the basis for the internal organization of parliaments. However, in how far committee members are autonomous in their work from their PPGs or whether they are tightly monitored is hitherto not studied. By analyzing these dynamics we can reach a deeper understanding of parliamentary decision-making processes. Method: The evidence is based on 101 interviews with legislators I conducted in the three parliaments. The interviews focus on the relationship of committee members with their PPGs colleagues in- and outside of the committee, with the PPG leadership and with committee members from other PPGs. I use the well-established congressional theories of legislative organization and the ‘keeping tabs on coalition partners’ perspective. The theories are discussed with regard to their limitations and are used as heuristic devices to deduct several rationales. The interviews indicate the presence of different strategies of PPGs across countries. Legislators in Irish PPGs are very limited with regard to their room for manoeuvre in committees. In the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag, legislators find themselves within an intricate system of within-PPG clusters. These clusters function as watchdogs to ensure a form of collective intelligence and collective responsibility for the decision-making process.

Key words: Legislative organization, Committees, Bundestag, Tweede Kamer, Dáil Éireann.

1 Correspondence address: Tim Alexander Mickler, Wassenaarseweg 52, 2333 AK Leiden, the Netherlands; Phone: +31 (0)71 527 6199, Email: t.a.mickler@fsw.leidenuniv.nl.
Introduction: The Significance of Committees in Parliaments

Parliaments are present throughout the world and play a central role in almost all political systems. They engage in a wide variety of tasks. Traditionally, four primary core tasks and functions are distinguished: oversight, policy-making, linkage, and representation (Loewenberg, 2011; Kreppel, 2014). Most legislatures² fulfil these to some degree. However, visitors of parliaments are sometimes baffled when watching the actual public display of decision-making process of their elected representatives. These plenary sessions, which bring together all the members of parliament (MPs) to collectively take decisions in the plenary hall of the parliament, often portray a half-empty room, and (seemingly) disinterested legislators who only listen to the debates with one ear. The conclusion that is sometimes drawn is that legislators do not represent the demands of the citizens and, generally speaking, fail to fulfil the functions expected from them. Yet, this is a reductionist view of the internal working procedures of parliaments. Beyond the immediately visible plenary session, parliaments are remarkable and highly complex institutions which work through different venues in which decisions are prepared or even taken. Once constituted, parliaments and their members differentiate themselves in their daily operation to be able to fully exert the powers that are formally granted to them and to dutifully fulfil the functions expected from them. The plenary session is mostly simply the public display of the decisions taken in these other venues.

Among the most important venues, which are vital to the functioning of parliaments, are parliamentary committees. Laundy (1989, p.96) notes that "all parliaments work to a greater extent or lesser extent through committees" (see also National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, 1996). Within legislatures, committees are the prime organisational structures for the preparation of plenary sessions and documents and provide a focal point for parliament’s activity. Committees are heavily involved in shaping collective outcomes. This heavy reliance of parliaments on committees presents an interesting puzzle which serves as the starting point of this study. After each election, parliaments around the world organize themselves and split into smaller subgroups and effectively work through smaller subgroups. Conceptually, this process of differentiation into different positions can be thought of as legislative organisation. Within this process "resources and parliamentary rights [are assigned] to individual legislators or groups of legislators" (Krehbiel, 1992, p. 2). Mattson and Strøm (1995, p.62) distinguish the specialisation in terms of "hierarchy (functional differentiation) and specialisation (horizontal differentiation)". The process of differentiation is a universal phenomenon and there is a large variation in how parliaments organize themselves. Numerous parliamentary resources and positions are distributed in this process. Committees are an outcome of this process. When committees subdivide the plenum and prepare decisions for the floor, or

---
² I use the terms legislatures and parliaments, as well as legislators and members of parliament interchangeably.
even take them on behalf of the floor, what are the implications of the reliance of committees for the working procedures of parliaments and the execution of the functions ascribed to parliaments. Whose views are represented and how are decisions taken within these sub-groups of legislators? These questions are at the core of democratic decision making processes. In order to address these questions we need to reach a deeper understanding on how committee work is organised within legislatures.

An important 'gatekeeper' to consider in the internal organisation of legislatures are partisan groups within the legislature. These consist of all members within the representative body who are "elected either under the same party label or under the label of different parties that do not compete against each other in elections, and who do not explicitly create a group for technical reasons only" (Heidar & Koole, 2000, p. 249). These parliamentary party groups (PPGs) put more or less severe constraints on the legislator. Strong parliamentary party groups can especially be found in legislatures of parliamentary systems of government which are heavily involved in the organisation of a legislature and the process of legislative organisation. The question arises how these parliamentary party groups organise their work in committees.

Initial studies focused mainly on the assignment process of legislators to committees and what criteria explain the assignment process of committee members in legislatures with strong parliamentary party groups. Although the initial focus on the assignment issue makes sense, we know surprisingly little about the working procedures of committees and the relationship of committee members to their respective parliamentary party group meeting. The level of independence of committee members vis-à-vis their parliamentary party groups and other actors once they are assigned is subject to only very few studies. In how far committee members are autonomous or are tightly monitored and have to report back to their parliamentary party group is hitherto not widely studied. How exactly committee work is coordinated between committee members and these groups is subject of only very few studies. This study aims to give more insight into these relationships and the links between individual committee members and other groups outside of the committee by analysing formal and informal rules which can restrain the behaviour of MPs in committees. The main research question is formulated as: Once appointed, how is the work in legislative committees coordinated? What is the relationship between members in the committees and other groups in the legislature?

These groups are referred to differently in different countries, e.g. Fraktion (Germany), fractie (Netherlands), Club (Austria), or simply party group. In the U.S. Congress these are referred to as party conferences. Following Heidar and Koole (2000) the term parliamentary party groups (PPG) is used as a generic term to describe these partisan groups in this study.
Theories on Legislative Organisation - Congressional Perspectives and "Keeping Tab"

It has been noted that although "other legislatures exist, of course [...] the scholarly world of legislative studies is, overwhelmingly, a world that studies the U.S. Congress" (Gamm & Huber, 2002, p.313). The theoretical treatment of the process of legislative organisation and on committees is characterised largely by the distinction of the established United States literature versus the more recent non-U.S. literature. The extensive study of the U.S. Congress has led to the development of three distinctive perspectives on legislative organisation. These theories are usually referred to as the distributive, informational and partisan theory of legislative organisation. The only outlier to this congressional bias is a more recent perspective which argues that the internal organisation of legislatures aids to 'keep tab' on coalition partners. All of these theories will be briefly discussed.

The distributive theory of legislative organisation derives its name from the shared notion that committees are established to provide legislators with means for the distribution of particularistic benefits to their constituents. At its core the distributive theory has the central assumption that legislatures are highly decentralised institutions which are dominated by geographical concerns (Shepsle, 1978; Weingast, 1979; Shepsle & Weingast, 1982; Weingast & Marshall, 1988; Munger, 1988). Legislators are ultimately interested in securing their own re-election. In order to facilitate this goal legislators engage in logrolling, i.e. the mutually beneficial exchange of influence in issues of high salience issues for their own advantage (gains from trade). This, however, creates a dilemma. After engaging in log-rolling and exchanging votes, legislators fear prospective defection. To solve this, legislators seek additional mechanisms to maintain their bargains. The distributive theory argues that institutions created by the legislature, and primarily the committee system, is the solution to this problem. By dividing policy areas in committees, a decentralised agenda control system is created. This gives interested legislators a chance to join their respective field and 'cluster' in committees. As mainly those legislators join a committee, who have a 'stake' in the committee's jurisdiction, the composition of committees is predicted to be highly unrepresentative of their parent body (Krehbiel, 1990, p.149).

The informational theory of legislative organisation opposes the distributive theory with regard to its central concepts and its predictions. This perspective departs from two assumptions of the functioning of Congress (see also Krehbiel, 1992): Policies are selected in the "presence of substantial uncertainty about their consequences upon implementation" (Gilligan & Krehbiel, 1990, p. 533) and policies cannot be enacted without the consent of the majority of the legislature's members. This emphasis on the uncertainty that legislators face in policy making has important ramifications for the internal organisation of legislatures. To reduce uncertainty Congress uses the "endogenously selected institutional devices and resources to exploit the special talents of its exogenously elected members"
Legislative institutions (such as committees) are the prime organisational means to provide the possibility for specialised information. The informational perspective argues that committees emerge to make legislative specialisation possible. Interested members can join them to obtain superior information about intended or unintended outcomes of bills. This minimises the occurrence of unintended effects. Committees are merely agents of the chamber and purely instrumental (Krehbiel, 1990, 1992; Gilligan & Krehbiel, 1990).

The two theoretical perspectives introduced so far, despite being contradictory in their predictions, share one common assumption: The absence of partisan organisation as major force in the organisation of the U.S. Congress. Contradicting this view, a bulk of literature referred to as partisan theory of legislative organisation claims that parliamentary party groups are driving forces in Congress. Usually two types are distinguished, partisan cartel theory (Cox & McCubbins, 1993, 2007) and the theory of conditional party government (Aldrich & Rohde, 1997, 1998, 2000, 2001). The partisan theory views committees as the agents of the majority parliamentary party group leadership. The majority parliamentary party group leadership has several instruments at hand to control committees and affect committee decisions: the power to create and dissolve them, 'stacking' the deck in its own favour and by being able to control their resources. In the hands of central parliamentary party group authority, committees become part of the reward system to induce loyalty. Loyalty to the parliamentary party group leadership is a substantive determinant of committee assignment. It is assumed that especially in those committees that have an effect on the national perception of the party (i.e. those offering uniform externalities) the preferences of the committee members "will tend to have contingents that are microcosms of their party caucus" (Cox & McCubbins, 1993, p.199). There might, however, be a bias towards the most loyal MPs.

These three congressional perspectives have largely structured the scientific debate on committees. There is one exception to the congressional bias in theories of legislative organisation. This new perspective is proposed by Martin and Vanberg (2011) who address the issue of legislative organisation from the angle of a central puzzle of multi-party government (coalition) situations: the tension between the coalition partners. This tension exists because coalition parties are forced to govern jointly and make compromises, but are held accountable separately at the next ballot box. This 'dilemma of coalition government' means that parties are concerned to be 'punished' for being "overly accommodating in their dealings with their coalition partners" (Martin & Vanberg, 2011, p.3). To minimize this risk and attract voters parties try to monitor, or "keep tabs", their coalition partners. Apart from these within-government policing mechanisms (such as junior ministers), Martin and

---

4 Within this decision the jurisdiction of a committee plays an important role in deciding how strictly a parliamentary party group acts. Considering the external effects of each committee (i.e. who is affected) the authors distinguish committees with uniform externalities (national scale), targeted externalities (narrowly targeted, regional) and committees with mixed externalities.
Vanberg (2011, p.4) claim that parliaments (via the legislative process) also play a central role in coalition situations to "police the bargain" and control ministerial drift. Martin and Vanberg (2011) argue that parliamentary institutions (and especially committees) are established to minimize agency loss in these coalition situations. It is argued that the legislative process is "an institutional device that coalition parties can employ to counteract ministerial discretion" (Martin & Vanberg, 2011, p. 18). The legislative committee system is the most important institution to control for ministerial drift of the coalition partners. Committees are involved in the legislative process by scrutinizing, and potentially amending, drafting legislation. They therefore serve as means to acquire information and solve delegation and intra-coalition problems.\footnote{At close reading, this theory contains elements of the congressional theories in some respects. There are reminiscent aspects of the informational rationale, with regard to the goal of minimizing uncertainty in the policy making process. The two theories differ with a different principal-agent relationship as it changes from individual legislators to coalition partners which utilize the committee system to check on each other. Additionally, it shares certain assumptions with the partisan theory of legislative organisation. It highlights the fear of agency loss and risking of losing votes at the next election.}

The Debate on Committees: A Review of the Literature

Several studies attempted to test the propositions of the three congressional perspectives on legislative organisation. Especially with regard to the theme of committee assignments, a rich body of literature is available on the U.S. Congress (Overby & Kazee, 2000; Prince & Overby, 2005; Battista, 2006, 2009; Battista et al., 2012; Hamm et al., 2011; Adler & Lapinski, 1997; Adler, 2000; Frisch & Kelly, 2004; Krehbiel, 1990, 1993; Hamm et al., 2011; Hedlund & Hamm, 1996; Carsey & Rundquist, 1999; Kanthak, 2009). Outside of the United States there was hardly any systematic research on committees in legislatures other than the U.S. Congress. It was not until the late 1990s that the study of committees gained momentum. Research on committees outside of the U.S. Congress initially focused primarily on the European Parliament. With numerous studies on the assignment of individual committee members (Bowler & Farrell, 1995; Whitaker, 2005; McElroy, 2006; Yordanova, 2009, 2011), which applied the congressional framework, the European Parliament is by now comparatively well-researched. A number of studies of national legislatures argued that committee assignments are affected by electoral rules or candidate selection procedures (Cain et al., 1987; Stratmann & Baur, 2002; Pekkanen et al., 2006; Crisp et al., 2009; Gschwend et al., 2009). More recent studies on committee assignments in national legislatures makes explicit usage of the congressional theories (Ciftci et al., 2008; Hansen, 2010, 2011; Battle, 2011; Fujimura, 2012; Mickler, 2013; Raymond & Holt, 2014). These studies have shown great variation in assignment patterns across and within systems and have greatly increased our understanding of 'who gets what and why'.

The actual decision making and conflict resolution in committees has attracted little scholarly attention (see for exceptions Damgaard & Mattson, 2004; Damgaard, 1995;
Sartori (1987) argues that committees are consensus building institutions and an ideal arena for conflict resolution. Sartori viewed committees as an ideal arena for conflict resolution and consensus seeking, stating that "what is peculiar to committees is that their members engage in exchanges over time and having especially in view a future time" (Sartori, 1987, p.229). Only little research has since then tackled this issue. On a theoretical level Damgaard (1995) provides insight into the question how parliamentary party groups may control or constrain the behaviour of their committee members. Despite being essential for understanding how parliaments work in Western Europe the author concludes that none of these three questions is hitherto well-researched (Damgaard, 1995, p. 312).

Empirically, the view of committees as vital co-operative structures in which a compromise can be achieved by unanimity was challenged by Damgaard and Mattson (2004). They analysed the level of conflict and consensus in committee based on a selection of 608 bills submitted to committees in 17 legislatures in Western Europe in the 1980s. Their findings are surprising as there seems to be non-unanimity in the vast majority of cases. They conclude that "to paraphrase Sartori: the parliamentary committees fail to function in dealing with more than every other bill!" (Damgaard & Mattsson, 2004, p. 119). Even more striking is the finding that conflict is more common in strong committee systems, a conclusion that goes against the Sartorian view of committees which implies "a positive correlation between strong committees, consensus in committees and strong parliaments" (Damgaard & Mattson, 2004, p. 114). The comparative study thus confirms earlier single case studies of Sweden (Jerneck et al., 1988) and Norway (Rommetvedt, 1998). Support for Sartori's view on committees was given by an analysis of consensus and conflict in committees of the 5th and 6th European Parliament by Settembri and Neuhold (2009). Their results show that when votes take place, "votes in all committees and under all procedures are virtually unanimous" (Settembri & Neuhold, 2009, p. 153). This leads the authors to conclude that committees are very successful in building a consensual deal.

### Using Congressional Theories Outside of the U.S. Congress: A Defence

In order to analyse the working procedures of committees, a coherent theoretical framework needs to be set up. Like other studies which have analysed committee workings in parliamentary systems as well, this study first turns to the congressional framework of distributional, informational and partisan theories of legislative organisation. As the congressional theories were originally developed against the backdrop of a particular legislature, one might object that their assumptions are specific to the United States and...
thus do not ‘travel’ well to other legislatures. Some scholars have argued against drawing too much on the congressional theories (Hansen, 2011; Yordanova, 2011). However, the congressional theories are the main perspectives on how committees work. Although committees legislatures outside the U.S. have since recently increasingly been in the scholarly focus, they lack an ‘own’ theoretical framework comparable to the U.S. theories. The knowledge and insight gained from a long-standing research tradition on the U.S. Congress and U.S. state legislatures can hardly be ignored and needs to be taken into consideration. Legislatures of parliamentary system of government which possess strong parliamentary party groups provide additional ground for thoroughly testing their predictions as they vary with regard to their internal organisation. Combining the rich literature on committees in the United States to the study of committees in other legislatures is therefore sensible. The predictions of the theories are not simply transferred, but are adapted to the new institutional setting. I argue, that the congressional theories are inherently useful for the study of other legislatures, when certain differences are accounted for.

In order to apply the congressional theories to the new institutional setting the most fundamental adaptation is a redefinition of the role of parliamentary party groups. In legislatures of countries with a parliamentary system of government there is no question that parliamentary party groups are central actors in the inner workings of the analysed legislatures and have an important role in the assignment procedure and in committee proceedings. Parliamentary party groups and permanent committees are the two crucial organisational structures in parliaments, but the former clearly dominates the latter (Damgaard, 1995). The assumption of non-restrictiveness of parliamentary party groups advocated by the informational and distributive theory needs to be relaxed for the analysis. Parliamentary party groups are the main gate keepers within legislatures. It can then be tested, whether parliamentary party groups use committees according to a distributional, informational or partisan rationale. In order to clarify these different rationales the basic concepts and predictions of each perspective have to be extracted.

The key concepts on the way how strong parliamentary party groups organize their work in committees in legislatures are formulated as following: Committees are either organised to offer particularistic benefits to groups outside parliament (distributive rationale), part of the reward system of parliamentary party groups to monitor policies of national importance of the party (partisan rationale), provide means to deal with the workload of the chamber, or improve the efficiency of the legislative process for the parliamentary party group (informational rationale). These key concepts indicate valid strategies that can be pursued by parliamentary party groups. By adapting the theories like this their predictions, I argue, are not broadened beyond reason. Rather, informational and distributive perspectives are well-suited to be incorporate into a parliamentary party group-centred context. The 'keeping tabs' perspective is added as it highlights the usage of
the committee system to check on coalition partners.

**Expectations Committee Mode of Operation: How Autonomous are Committee Members?**

Committees are privileged institutions which, at least theoretically, offer property rights in a given policy area. Once assigned, committee members have the right and duty to work on issues within their jurisdiction. By doing so committee negotiations among this sub-group of legislators constrain the space of possible outcomes. Thus, they "modify the decision-making principle of one person, one vote" (Mattson & Strom, 2004, p.92) and shape the behaviour of legislators. However, usually being members of a parliamentary party group, the analysis will focus on how legislators in committees organise their work in committees and in how far they are constrained. The question arises, how autonomous are members in committees? How is the work in committees communicated and coordinated with other legislators from the same parliamentary party group who are not on the committee?

The 'basic' relationship of the relationship between individual legislators and his/her parliamentary party groups is depicted in Figure 1 below. This formal set-up shows several legislators from one parliamentary party group who are allocated to committees. This schematic depiction is, at first sight, applicable to all parliaments.

**Figure 1: Schematic depiction of relationship between one parliamentary party group and its members in committees**

Source: Own depiction.

This study gives more insight into the relationship of individual committee members and other actors in the legislature. Altogether, four relationships are covered in the analysis. These are deemed to be the most important ones for the purpose of this study. The 'point of departure' is the individual legislator in a committee. The analysis focuses specifically on a
legislator’s relation (here denoted as MP_{1A}) with:

- 'rank-and-file' legislators from the same parliamentary party group on the same committee (MP_{2A}, MP_{3A})
- 'rank-and-file' legislators from the same parliamentary party group not on the same committee (MP_{4A}, ..., MP_{11A})
- 'rank-and-file' legislators from other parliamentary party groups on the same committee (MP_{1B}, MP_{2B}, MP_{3B}, MP_{1C}, MP_{2C})
- the leadership of their own parliamentary party group (MP_{12A})

The theoretical framework sketches several broad approaches which can be distinguished to capture the relationship between individual legislators in committees and these four other actors/groups of actors. It should be noted that the theoretical framework is to a certain extent stretched for this part. The theories were not developed to account for this type of analysis. However, it is possible to deduce several clear ‘strategies’ which follow the predictions of each theory. With these rationales enough theoretical predictions are given to allow for a comparison between parliamentary party groups and systems.

According to an informational logic of committee workings, unintended changes at the committee stage are undesirable and a major concern to other legislators from the same parliamentary party group. Subsequently, the rank-and-file members and the leadership of the parliamentary party group are expected to keep a close eye on everything that happens in committee. In terms of room for manoeuvre for the individual legislators on the committee, very little autonomy is granted to committee members. Even though they are assigned to the committee and may develop the initial position autonomously, they have clear reporting requirements. The positions that are taken in committees can be vetoed by the majority of the parliamentary party group who still remains the main actor. The parliamentary party group leadership has a veto right in all areas and can take over issues it deems to be of major importance, but it is still accountable to the parliamentary party group. Within committees, similar proceedings are maintained. Legislators are not autonomous in their decisions but need to coordinate and communicate their positions with other legislators from the same parliamentary party group. These legislators are a main point for checking positions. Working together closely with legislators of the same parliamentary party group is encouraged, working together with legislators from other parliamentary party groups on the same committees is not.

On the other 'extreme', a parliamentary party group may give a high degree of autonomy to the committee members in their work (distributional rationale). Being assigned to a committee means having 'property rights'. According to this rationale the actual committee members are relatively independent in their work from the parliamentary party group. They are able to develop the positions taken in committee with a high degree of autonomy from their parliamentary party group colleagues on the same committee and other legislators.
who are not on the same committee. There are very few reporting requirements and limited possibilities for other legislators from the same parliamentary party group who are not on the committee to veto a position taken by committee members. Committees develop into relatively closed networks, in which only those who are actually on the committee have a say. The relationship with legislators from other parliamentary party groups on the same committee is closer than those with legislators from the same committee who are not on the committee. The parliamentary party group leadership grants high levels of autonomy to committee members as well.

In terms of committee workings, the 'keeping tabs' perspective and the partisan theory have similar predictions. Both theories can be interpreted as a "medium" way which highlights the conditional nature of monitoring and actions. Both are used in this study for a 'middle ground' which argue that some committees are more closely monitored, while others are not. They differ, however, in the reason on why these committees are special. The partisan theory highlights the importance of certain issues which are of major importance for the parliamentary party group at the next elections. The committees dealing with these issues are therefore assumed to be more closely monitored. The 'keeping tabs' perspective highlights policy disagreement between the parliamentary party group of a minister and ministers of the coalition partners to explain actions of the parliamentary party group. To provide evidence for this perspective, the interviews should uncover that legislators who are assigned to committees which deal with divisive issues between coalition partners are more closely monitored than others. With regard to the relationship between other legislators from the same parliamentary party group, committee members on these 'high importance' committees have to follow the parliamentary party groups' preferences closely. Those committees whose subject matter only concerns a small subgroup of legislators and are not of interest to the majority of the parliamentary party group are relatively autonomous. All in all, the role of the leadership is strengthened compared to the informational and the distributive theory. Decisions taken in committee and positions which are developed need to be communicated and coordinated with the leadership rather than the 'rank-and-file' legislators from the parliamentary party group. The main task of the leadership is to 'protect' the parliamentary party group as a whole from undesirable outcomes which might harm it in the long run.

**Case Selection: Small-n Focused Comparison of Committee Workings**

The study is conducted via in-depth case analyses on a smaller number of legislatures. The 'baseline' case selection of the study consists of advanced democracies with a parliamentary system of government which possess strong parliamentary party groups (including France which is usually classified as semi-presidential because it has characteristics of both presidential and parliamentary systems) which possess and institutionalised party system
and have established a system of permanent committees and reasonable size\(^7\). How many and which cases are analysed, is an essential part of the research project. One of the aims of the research project is to test the application of congressional theories of legislative organisation outside of their 'home turf' to a situation in which parliamentary party groups are strong. Therefore, a variety of cases needs to be selected where parliamentary party groups are strong but which differ with regard to another key variable. Ideally, this strategic case selection includes a most likely case, where most of the explanatory power of congressional theories occurs, as well as less likely cases. This strategy provides some leverage to give the theories a thorough test. A central issue in the scientific discourse on legislative organisation, and a reoccurring theme in all congressional theories, is whether internal structures such as committees allow individual legislators to serve their constituencies. The analysis aims to test the theoretical predictions across several cases which differ with regard to the constituency focus of individual legislators. Figure 2 depicts the number of MPs per district. Although this indicator is not a direct measurement of the connectedness that a legislator might feel towards his or her constituents, it is a useful proxy to indicate how many legislators are responsible for individual districts.

Several clusters of electoral systems are visible. In the lower right-hand corner are those countries where there is no clear connection between individual legislators and individual districts. The 120 legislators in the Israeli Knesset, as well as the 150 legislators of the Dutch Tweede Kamer are elected in a single nation-wide district. The Dutch Tweede Kamer was chosen as a representative case of this group. Several countries apply mixed systems. This means that voters can cast two votes, one on a district candidate and one for a party list. Mixed-member majoritarian is used in the election of the Japanese House of Representatives (Shūgiin) while New Zealand and Germany use mixed-member proportional systems. In the latter system, the number of seats per party is largely determined by the party vote while in the Japanese system there is no relationship between the first and second vote. From those countries, Germany was chosen as a representative case. The left-hand side of the plot clusters all legislatures in which all MPs are elected in single-member districts or in districts with a low magnitude. Within these legislatures MPs are assumed to have relatively strong local roots. These are all legislatures in which MPs are elected in single member districts (the French Assemblée Nationale, the Australian House of Representatives, and the Canadian

---

\(^7\) The following cases are included (LH = Lower House in case of bicameral legislatures): Australia: House of Representatives\(^1\)\(^1\); Austria: Nationalrat\(^1\)\(^1\); Belgium: Kamer van Volksvertegenwoordigers\(^1\)\(^1\); Canada: House of Commons\(^1\)\(^1\); Denmark: Folketing; Estonia: Riigikogu; Finland: Eduskunta; Germany: Bundestag\(^1\)\(^1\); Greece: Vouli ton Ellinon; Iceland: Althing; Ireland: (Dáil Éireann)\(^1\)\(^1\); Israel: Knesset; Italy: Camera dei Deputati\(^1\)\(^1\); Japan: Shūgiin\(^1\)\(^1\); Luxembourg: Chambre des Députés; Malta: House of Representatives; The Netherlands: Tweede Kamer\(^1\)\(^1\); New Zealand: House of Representatives; Norway: Storting; Portugal: Assembleia da República; Spain: Congreso de los Disputados\(^1\)\(^1\); Sweden: Riksdag; Switzerland: Nationalrat\(^1\)\(^1\). The latter restrictions are taken in order to prevent the inclusion of countries with high levels of volatility (high turnover rates cause problems regarding the building up of seniority and expertise) and unclear rules about the internal organisation of parliamentary party groups in non-institutionalised party systems.
Figure 2: Comparison district magnitude in twenty-two legislatures with strong parliamentary party groups

Source: Own data set; Some legislatures were placed slightly different to prevent overlap of the labels. For the countries which use a mixed system the data points were split into all legislators and those elected into parliament via the party list vote (indicated with 'list') and the nominal tier (indicated with 'nom'). To my best knowledge the party votes in New Zealand are distributed on a national level which is why this case is situated there as well.

House of Commons) and small-n multi-member districts by Single Transferable Vote (the Irish Dáil Éireann and the Maltese House of Representatives). Despite the fact that no Teachta Dála (member of Dáil Éireann, TD) has a constituency for which he or she is uniquely responsible (district magnitude varies between 3 and 5), the legislators in this legislature are known to have very strong local connections. In a comparative study on constituency focus which includes several cases with strong local connections, Heitshusen et al. (2005) show that all legislators in these countries highly prioritize constituency work. Although, unsurprisingly legislators elected from single member district report a slightly stronger constituency focus than those in the Irish Dáil and the New Zealand House of Representatives, their data indicate that "half of Irish TDs and New Zealand list MPs rank constituency focus at least at the medium rank" (Heitshusen et al., 2005, p. 42). This importance of the local sphere and strong constituency orientation of Irish TDs is also discussed by Farrell et al. (2012). This makes the Irish Dáil a good choice for a legislature with strong links of its individual legislators to their constituencies.
Data

The analysis is primarily focused on procedures within PPGs and the norms and informal rules which guide the internal processes. In order to capture these, the study relies on in-depth interviews with parliamentary party group leaders and committee members in all three legislatures. The main issue is the room for manoeuvre that legislators have in committee and the relationship between legislators in committee and their parliamentary party group colleagues in the parliamentary party group meeting. Relying on the evidence from in-depth interviews in this part is necessary because there is no meaningful way of statistically analysing informal relationships and inter-personal connections. Qualitative methods provide a way to get a deeper understanding of how parliamentary party groups internally distribute power among their members.

Table 1: Number interviewed legislators per country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bundestag</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SPD</td>
<td>17 (+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDU/CSU</td>
<td>16 (+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Die Linke</td>
<td>10 (+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B90/Grüne</td>
<td>8 (+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FDP</td>
<td>(+1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>51 (56)</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dáil Éireann</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fine Gael</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fianna Fáil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sinn Féin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tweede Kamer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PvdA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VVD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PVV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Own data set.

The interviews were conducted by the author in December 2014 (Ireland), January 2015 (Germany), three interview were conducted by telephone in February 2015) and in the period of April - May 2015 in the Netherlands. The semi-structured interviews used a questionnaire which consisted, among other issues, the relationship between members in committee vis-à-vis their parliamentary party group in general, other members in committee and, where applicable, other coalition MPs. Legislators were asked about their level of autonomy and the links between them as committee members and a) their parliamentary party group colleagues on the same committee, b) legislators from other parliamentary party groups on the same committee, and c) parliamentary party group colleagues not on the committee (including the parliamentary party group leadership).

A total of 101 legislators were interviewed. The distribution is listed in Table 1.\(^8\) In the Tweede Kamer, one deputy secretary (Dutch: *ambtelijk secretaris*) of a parliamentary party

---

\(^8\) The table also lists the FDP although it is not represented in the 18th Bundestag. In the course of an earlier study project the whips of each parliamentary party group in the 17th Bundestag were interviewed concerning the selection criteria (see Mickler, 2013). The FDP was still represented in parliament in this legislative period. These talks are also listed in this table in brackets (+1).
group, who is involved in organisational matters, was interviewed. In Germany and Ireland legislators from every parliamentary party group were interviewed. This includes independent Irish legislators who formed the Technical Group (TG) as an independent alliance. In the Netherlands, I was unable to schedule interviews with several smaller parliamentary party groups (D66, GroenLinks, ChristenUnie, SGP and Partij voor de Dieren). In most cases, the high workload of legislators of these smaller parliamentary party groups made the participation not feasible. The insight with regard to the working procedure of opposition parliamentary party groups therefore rests solely on the evidence provided by legislators of the PVV, CDA and SP.

**Individual Committee Members and their Parliamentary Party Group**

This section first discusses the processes of parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag and then places them in the deduced rationales. The procedures in these legislatures are similar and therefore depicted in the same section. In both of these legislatures, distinctive mechanisms and clear procedures are established which follow a more or less clear division of tasks. The process of parliamentary party groups in the Dáil is much looser (with the exception of the Fine Gael parliamentary party group, which is further discussed below) and is therefore discussed in the following section (p. 26).

**The Individual Legislator in the Policy-Making Process of the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag**

The 'standard protocol' in PPGs of the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer is that spokespersons are responsible for the content of the portfolio and mandated to speak on behalf of the parliamentary party group in this area outside of the legislature (towards the media, the general public) and inside, i.e. in case a plenary debate takes place. In the Bundestag and in the Tweede Kamer, this sectorisation and distribution of functional responsibility is taken very seriously. When asked whether it would be possible that a legislator would hand in a motion in another legislators' portfolio without first consulting the 'holder' of the portfolio, one respondent in the Bundestag argued:

"Unimaginable. No, this is not possible at all, would not happen. This is why we distribute responsibilities. If everybody could become active outside of his hobby horse (German: Steckenpferd) then total chaos would break loose" (Interview Bundestag, 150123B)

---

9 German legislators are first assigned to committees and then get allocated spokespersonships, i.e. as Sprecher / Berichterstatter (rapporteur). This is largely coordinated within the within-PPG work groups (German: Arbeitskreise and Arbeitsgruppen) which distribute these relatively autonomously from the parliamentary party group.)
An exception to this clear 'property right' is when the parliamentary party group leadership decides to take over. The parliamentary party group leadership is privileged in this regard and may always decide to do so. The issues taken over are often referred to as being declared as 'matter for the boss' (German: Chefsache. Since recently, this is also used as a loanword in the Netherlands, e.g. Interview Bundestag, 151919B; Interview Tweede Kamer, 150520A). Apart from the parliamentary party group leadership, the chairs of the within-PPG work group (German: Arbeitsgruppen in the SPD and CDU/CSU and Arbeitskreise in case of the Green Party and The Left) in the Bundestag are also allowed to take over an issue (Interview Bundestag, 150119A). Such takeovers mostly occur if a matter is seen as politically very sensitive or touches the very core of coalition agreements in case of government parliamentary party groups.

Apart from these exceptions, the 'standard protocol' in parliamentary party groups of the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer dictates that spokespersons have the right and duty to work on an issue first if it fits into their portfolio with great autonomy from the input of other legislators of the parliamentary party group. The room for manoeuvre of the spokesperson is, however, constrained by several factors. For government parliamentary party groups the most restrictive determinant refers to issues which are clearly regulated in the coalition agreement (Dutch: regeerakkoord; German: Koalitionsvertrag) (e.g. Interview Bundestag, 151201B; 151401C; 152901F; Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423A). The next orientation mark (which is applicable for all parliamentary party groups) is the electoral manifesto of the party as well as the party's declaration of principles. Especially Dutch legislators argued that the declaration of principles (Dutch: beginselprogramma; German: Parteiprogramm) is an important source to check the own position against (e.g. Interview Tweede Kamer, 150414A; 150422E; 150520B). More concrete prescriptions on what needs to be included in the position can occur in the Bundestag if a resolution has been adopted by a parliamentary party group (German: Fraktionsbeschluss). Spokespersons are expected to follow the content of this resolution meticulously (Interview Bundestag, 150119A).

When these sources do not provide any point of reference, then the legislator's judgement is the last step (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150429; also Interview Bundestag, 150119A). This range of factors contradicts the prediction of the distributive theory. Legislators may be tasked to develop the position, but they cannot simply determine it. Rather, the task of developing a position is delegated to them but needs to fulfil certain criteria and it needs to have majority appeal. The development of the position therefore is best captured by an informational rationale.
The Influence on the Initial Position: The Internal ‘Layers’ of PPGs in the Bundestag and in the Tweede Kamer

After the spokespersons have developed their position, they find themselves in a complex internal structure that parliamentary party groups in the Bundestag and the larger parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer (PvdA and VVD) have set up. In the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag, each parliamentary party group has established a ‘layered’ setup which embeds legislators who serve on particular committees, or who are assigned as spokespersons.

SPD and CDU/CSU have set up corresponding within-PPG work groups (German: Arbeitsgruppe) for each committee. All parliamentary party group members who serve on the committee are a member of this group as well. The two parliamentary party groups of The Left and the Green Party, due to their smaller size, do not have a corresponding work group for every committee but cluster topics together in so called Arbeitskreise [usually abbreviated as AK I, AK II, etc.). The within-PPG work groups of these two parliamentary party groups thus do not mirror the committee structure of the parliament as a whole, but still have clearly demarcated areas.

In the Tweede Kamer the internal structure of the larger parliamentary party groups (PvdA and VVD) largely resembles the organisation of the smaller parliamentary party groups in the Bundestag. Both have established within-PPG work group which cover several topics (referred to as fractiecluster in the PvdA and fractiecommissie in the VVD). However, the parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer do not assign committee seats but portfolios to spokespersons (Dutch: woordvoerders). This determines the membership to committees. In the Tweede Kamer not all members of committees are actually spokespersons within the committees’ jurisdiction. These non-spokespersons are not a member of the within-PPG work group either and will not attend the meetings. Only those legislators whose area of responsibility touches a committee’s jurisdiction are included in a within-PPG work group. Figure 3 depicts the formal structure in the larger parliamentary party groups of CDU/CSU and SPD in the Bundestag; the Left and the Green Party as well as the larger Dutch parliamentary party groups.
Figure 3: Schematic depiction organisational layers analysed parliamentary party groups

(a) Schematic depiction organisational layers SPD and CDU/CSU in the Bundestag

(b) Schematic depiction organisational layers The Left and Green Party (Bundestag)

(c) Schematic depiction organisational layers larger parliamentary party groups Tweede Kamer (VVD, PvdA)
As a general rule, nothing is presented as the parliamentary party group’s position in a committee without prior consultation in this system of within-PPG work groups so that other legislators are able to provide input. This clearly supports the informational rationale. Across all parliamentary party groups in the two legislatures, the initial positions are usually prepared in written form for the discussion in the within-PPG work group. These initial proposals provide the baseline for further discussions in the within-PPG work group. In each of these within-PPG work groups all documents are discussed. This flow across layers ensures a form of "collective intelligence and collective responsibility" (Interview Bundestag, 150119B) and a "permanent process of feedback" (Interview Bundestag, 150119A). This resembles the process which is prescribed by the informational rationale very well. Rather than being highly autonomous, positions are constantly cross-checked by other legislators who are also experts in this area, but in a broader sense.

The degree to which these within-PPG work groups influence the initial position content-wise is to a great extent determined by the nature of the issue and no fixed rule can be described. It became clear from the interviews that the other legislators take the control function very seriously and that conflicts occur. The spokesperson’s initial position has to ‘survive’ this scrutiny. However, if one has to give an estimate of the rate of conflicts based on the interviews, they are not the rule but rather the exception (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150429A; Interview Bundestag, 150123B). In case the spokesperson is not able to refute the objectives to the satisfaction of his or her colleagues, a developed position can end at an impasse and not make it through the within-PPG work group (Interview Bundestag, 150127A; also 150129A). Discussions in the within-PPG work group were described as much more open compared to the more structured session in committee but also in the parliamentary party group meetings (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150521A; Interview Bundestag, 150128E). This is not to be confused with a disrespectful interaction, though, but best described as ‘hard but fair’. Formal votes are possible but they are an exception (Interview Bundestag, 150127B).

The immediate corresponding within-PPG work group is the formal hurdle which needs to be passed before the parliamentary party group meeting. Outside of their own within-PPG work group legislators frequently indicated that the decision-making process works on mutual trust (Interview Bundestag, 150129C; 150130B; Interviews Tweede Kamer, 140415A; 150415A). An exception of this non-intervention agreement are the cases mentioned earlier (sensitive, or very controversial issues - see discussion below). However, in addition to this, legislators need to anticipate which other portfolios outside of the within-PPG work group are affected. In order to prevent any conflicts at the level of the parliamentary party group meetings they are "well-advised" (Interview Bundestag, 150130E) to talk to other legislators or other within-PPG work groups within the parliamentary party group which might feel overlooked apart from the institutionalised channels of the within-PPG work group and the parliamentary party group meeting. This involvement of other legislators outside of the
formal structures further underlines the informational logic of committee workings in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag. Figure 4 pictures the hierarchy in a stylised fashion.

Figure 4: Schematic depiction relation spokesperson to work group and parliamentary party group meeting

![Diagram showing the hierarchy and process](source: Own depiction)

The Discussion in the Parliamentary Party Group Meeting

At the end of this 'ideal typical' process (which is applicable in most cases) everything converges in the plenary meeting of the parliamentary party group. Not everything is actually discussed in-depth in the meeting. The parliamentary party group meeting is seen as a last resort to discuss something. The discussion of a topic in-depth is "preferably avoided" (Interview Bundestag, 150130E) because there is simply not much time. The position presented by the within-PPG work group has weight (Interview Bundestag, 150129D). Several legislators in the Bundestag argued that they have never experienced that a position, which was proposed by a spokesperson and backed by the within-PPG work group, was changed so fundamentally that the parliamentary party group wanted to go in a
completely different way (Interview Bundestag, 150202; 150119A).

With regard to the scope of the discussion in the parliamentary party group meetings, the parliamentary practices in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag differ. In the Bundestag, interviewed legislators of all parliamentary party groups highlighted that the proposal needs to pass the parliamentary party group meeting in any case, at least formally. This clearly supports the informational rationale of committee proceedings. The parliamentary party group meeting is the "actual platform for the political formation of will" (Interview Bundestag, 150127A) and it is taken very seriously (Interview Bundestag, 150129B).

Non-controversial issues might, however, simply be mentioned for the legislators' information, but are then quickly passed. The parliamentary party group meeting serves in these cases as the venue for "final legitimation and the presentation of information rather than content-related clarification" (Interview Bundestag, 150119B). Nevertheless, every proposal needs to be presented in the parliamentary party group meeting to give legislators a chance to provide input. An issue will be discussed if conflicts at a lower level have not been defused.

In the Tweede Kamer everything also goes through the within-PPG work groups (if they exist). Regarding whether something is discussed in the parliamentary party group meeting, it is decisive whether an issue is dealt with in plenary session of the Tweede Kamer (i.e. motions, bills). This includes a debate on the minutes of a general debate (verslag van een algemeen overleg) in which motions can be proposed. If this is the case, the issue is always placed on the agenda of the parliamentary party group meeting. Issues which remain in committee in the form of a general debate (algemeen overleg) are not discussed in the parliamentary party group meeting, except if a spokesperson, the parliamentary party group leadership or another legislator specifically asks for it. This is applicable to both of the larger parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150429A; 150430B; 150520A; 150520D).

The possibility to present an issue in the parliamentary party group meeting was largely seen as a good thing which prevents 'tunnel vision' (Interview Bundestag, 150126B)

"And we had written this memo and I arrived at the parliamentary party group meeting and thought I would be backed by them and my parliamentary party group said 'boy, what have you done there?'. [...] But that was one very important thing and I really overlooked this. The technical story was sound, but the political side had completely escaped my notice. And then a parliamentary party group meeting is incredibly important" (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150520A).

In case something is controversial and the need is felt for a debate in the parliamentary party group meeting the spokesperson is usually first called on to explain the issue and the position that is proposed and "ask for agreement" (Interview Bundestag, 150127A). Interestingly, interviewed legislators argued that in every portfolio an issue can become
controversial (Interview Bundestag, 150130D; 150128C). However, several topics are more prone to be discussed. Some are valid across all parliamentary party groups, e.g. finance-related matters (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150416A; 150118A), others are more parliamentary party group specific. Those issues which are deemed to be of high importance do not necessarily have to be those which are likely to be discussed. This contradicts the expectation of the partisan theory which highlights that specific topics, which are central to the electoral success of the parliamentary party group, are closely monitored.

**In Case of No Agreement: The 'Escalation Ladder'**

The process hitherto described refers to the 'ideal typed process' of spokesperson developing a position and going through the various layers. This process resembles relatively closely to what was formulated as the informational rationale of committee proceedings. In case it is not possible to reach an agreement within a parliamentary party group there is an 'escalation ladder' which comes into operation. The general lines are the same and applicable to the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag.

They may occur in situations when within a parliamentary party group two (or more) spokespersons cannot reach an agreement. In such a case the issue has either a) reached a dead end or b) gets elevated to the level of the chairs of the within-PPG work groups who continue the discussion and see whether they are able to find an agreement. The chairs of the work groups have an important position in this regard. It was seen as important to "win them over" (Interview Bundestag, 150128E). In case the second level (work groups) cannot reach an agreement, the issue is lifted to the parliamentary party group leadership. If, in both legislatures within a parliamentary party group no conclusion can be reached at the lower levels, then this level tries to solve the issue (Interview Bundestag, 150119B; 150129D; Interview Tweede Kamer, 150521C, 150615A). Figure 5 shows this escalation ladder in a parliamentary party group in case two spokespersons of different within-PPG work groups cannot reach an agreement.

With the exception of level three, this process is the same in the Bundestag and the larger parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer. In the Bundestag this is a little more complex due to the setup of an extended parliamentary party group leadership (German: *geschäftsführende Fraktionsvorstand*). This group comprises the parliamentary party group leader (German: *Fraktionsvorsitzende*) and his or her substitutes (German: *Stellvertretende Fraktionsvorsitzende*) as well as the whips (German: *Parlamentarische Geschäftsführer*). Each of the deputy parliamentary party group leaders is assigned a rough portfolio which comprises one or more policy areas. The last step would be the parliamentary party group leader who can make the call on how things are done. This would then still be put to a vote in the parliamentary party group meeting (Interview Bundestag, 150130D). However, it should be
Figure 5: Schematic depiction escalation ladder within parliamentary party group

Source: Own depiction. The thin broken line depicts a situation in which a decision is passed back to the lower level.

noted that this describes a hypothetical situation, in most cases such conflicts are worked out and solved on the other levels and via negotiation in the groups.

The Process in the 'Smaller' Parliamentary Party Groups in the Tweede Kamer

In the smaller\textsuperscript{10} parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer (interviewed legislators came from the CDA, the PVV and the SP) a different internal sequence is followed. Due to their small sizes they manage their business without the intermediate step of within-PPG work groups.

However, an interviewed legislator from the SP indicated that, next to the parliamentary party group meeting, they meet for a ‘team meeting’ (Dutch: teamoverleg). This meeting comprises the parliamentary party group colleagues in their policy area as well as the policy advisor (Dutch: beleidsmedewerker) of the parliamentary party group. The aim of these meetings is to discuss the weekly agenda and to decide who is going to speak. The difference with the within-PPG work groups of the larger parliamentary party groups is that "this is all very informal and we [the participants of this team meeting] have thought of it ourselves. [...] But most committees have something similar." (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150416A).

The logic of this internal working procedure is very close to the one in the larger parliamentary party groups but not as ‘strict’. The parliamentary party group leadership is, as in the other parliamentary party groups of the Tweede Kamer, attentive and has the right to pick a debate which is considered important to discuss (Interview Tweede Kamer,

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Small’ refers to parliamentary party groups whose number of legislators is smaller than the number of specialised committees.
In the smaller parliamentary party groups of the Tweede Kamer, the connection between spokesperson and parliamentary party group leadership is more direct. As the three parliamentary party groups were in opposition at the time of the interviews, the legislators are also 'more free' and do not have to feed every single issue back to the parliamentary party group. An interviewed legislator of a small parliamentary party group argued that with regard to many issues the parliamentary party group's position has been established for years and there is no need to discuss it again. In case something is controversial it needs to pass through the within-PPG work groups (if it exists), but the parliamentary party group meeting in any case as well (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150416A; also Interview Tweede Kamer, 150414A).

In the PVV and the CDA, the other two smaller parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer from which legislators were interviewed, the line between spokesperson and parliamentary party group meeting is direct. No within-PPG work groups are established. Another similarity is that everything still needs to be discussed in the parliamentary party group meeting if it is controversial or dealt with in plenary session (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150521D; also Interview Tweede Kamer, 150520A). In this sense the same logic is applied as in the larger parliamentary party groups VVD and the PvdA. Similar to the SP, small issues can be dealt with solely at the level of the spokesperson in the PVV and the CDA (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150520D, 150520A).

The Role of the Parliamentary Party Group Leadership in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag

The theoretical framework predicts relatively diverse strategies for the actions of the leadership. The interviews in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag show that the parliamentary party group leadership in all parliamentary party groups has an umbrella-function in the whole process. It is highly attentive with regard to the developments in all within-PPG work groups. The primary source of information for the leadership is a special group which consists of the parliamentary party group leadership and the chairmen of the work groups. Such a board is established in the larger parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer as well as in all parliamentary party groups in the Bundestag (Interviews Tweede Kamer, 150430B; Interview Bundestag, 150114C).

This group serves the function of sharing information and for coordination. Via this group the parliamentary party group leadership gets updated constantly on the proceedings in each within-PPG work group. In all parliamentary party groups, the interviewed legislators argued that the discussion in this group does not primarily focus on the content of an issue. Rather it serves to inform the parliamentary party group leadership on the general direction in which the discussions in the within-PPG work groups are going and possible problems which may arise (Interview Bundestag, 150129C; Interview Tweede Kamer, 150506A). Additionally,
the parliamentary party group leadership gets all information it deems necessary outside of this institutionalised group by approaching individual spokespersons, policy advisers of the parliamentary party group and the chairs of the within-PPG work groups (Interview Bundestag, 150119C; Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423A)

As a general rule the parliamentary party group leadership always has the last word and a powerful, undeniable veto. This strengthening of the role of the leadership is ascribed to the partisan rationale. It is, however, not surprising that this right exists for the leadership in highly organised parliamentary party groups of the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag. A legislator argued that "no bill passes the parliamentary party group meeting when the leadership does not agree with it. I have not witnesses that in 12 years." (Interview Bundestag, 15013B, see also Interview Bundestag, 150119A, Interview Tweede Kamer, 150422E). The criterion that the parliamentary party group leadership primarily applies is whether the proposal can harm the parliamentary party group (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150521C).

When the leadership decides to take over an issue, it has the right to do so and to speak on it. Legislators then have to swallow this pill, although they are not always happy that something is taken out of their hands (Interview Bundestag, 150212A). However, there was no indication that this is a frequent occurrence. A legislator assessed that the parliamentary party group leadership is "friendly towards the expertise of the lower levels but also in our parliamentary party group there is 'Chefsache' and that is a good thing" (Interview Bundestag, 150119B; also 150115D).

'Outside of the Parliamentary Party Group’: The Relationship with Legislators of the Coalition Partner

For coalition parliamentary party groups the coordination with the coalition partner is an additional step in the process. The coalition parliamentary party groups have committed to working together, the iron rule is "not to surprise each other in committee" (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150422B; also 150423A). This can initiate "relatively complex parallel processes" with the specialist of the other parliamentary party group as well as the parliamentary party group leadership of both parliamentary party groups. There is really no guideline on how these processes run or how complex these become. It mostly depends on the policy differences between the parties, the importance of the issue and the level of politicisation (Interview Bundestag, 150123A). As a guideline, the pattern with regard to the internal escalation ladder is applicable in the same way between parliamentary party groups. The first link in the chain would be the designated spokespersons in each coalition parliamentary party group. Legislators would first align with the views in their own work groups as a primary focal point and would then talk to their counterpart in the coalition partner. However, this is often very much structured by the personal interaction between spokespersons (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150521C). In case spokespersons of coalition parliamentary party groups cannot
reach an agreement, an issue would again go up to the level of chairmen of the within-PPG work groups of the coalition parliamentary party groups. If the chairs of the within-PPG work group cannot solve the issue then it is placed on the level of the parliamentary party group leadership.

Figure 6: Schematic depiction escalation ladder between parliamentary party groups in coalition

There is very little evidence that the relationship between spokespersons of one coalition partner and another coalition partner is particularly amicable in committees. Several legislators highlighted that they had a good relationship with their counterpart, but legislators also mentioned the relationship as a 'partnership of convenience'. The main focus for most respondents is clearly their own parliamentary party group. Most legislators argued that they would first coordinate their decisions with their own within-PPG work groups, and then talk to the spokesperson of the coalition partner (see e.g. Interview Bundestag, 20150127A; Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423A, 150423B). This is not a fixed rule, but rather established practice. The same legislators also highlighted, that in certain situations one might first talk to the spokesperson of the coalition partner. This might be necessary because the nature of a topic requires a speedy decision and the within-PPG only meets in a couple of days (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423B).

Despite these exceptions, the prediction of the 'keeping tabs’ perspective are supported. Legislators frequently argued that their contact with spokespersons of the coalition partner is aimed to "keep an eye" on them (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423B)\(^\text{11}\). This is also illustrated by a German legislator who kept referring to the spokesperson of the coalition partner during the interviews as his "friend from the dark side of the force" (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423B).

\(^{11}\) In Dutch: "En ik wil hem ook een beetje in de gaten houden." (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150423B)
Bundestag, 150130E). This statement is of course amusing, but it highlights the close, yet distant relationship between these legislators.

**Committees as the Optimal Decision-Making Forum? The Dynamic Between Opposition and Government Legislators**

In general legislators highlighted a respectful interaction within committees. In the Bundestag, the huge majority of seats of the Great Coalition has led several committee chairs to adopt special rules which disproportionally benefit the smaller parliamentary party groups, e.g. with regard to speaking time (Interview Bundestag, 150128C). Outside of legislative discussions, a legislator argued that an ’esprit de corps’ (Interview Bundestag, 20150114C) is present which transcends party affiliation12.

However, this type of interaction is limited when it comes to debating policies. Contradicting Sartori’s view on committees, the interviews confirmed to a large extent the view by Damgaard and Mattson (2004) who have argued that there is no sign of weakening parliamentary party group affiliation in committees. There was little evidence that parliamentary party group boundaries are blurred. During debates parliamentary party group alignment is not weakened. One legislator argued that ”the hardest debate we had since [my first year in the chamber] was during a general consultation (Dutch: algemeen overleg).” (Interview Tweede Kamer, 150521D), and not during a plenary session. There is very limited evidence from the interviews that discussions in committee do not reflect the government-opposition divide from the chamber. This is despite the fact that within a committee legislators are clustered who work on topics which are very dear to them. Party politics trumps fraternisation with legislators from other parliamentary party groups who might feel the same about the topic. One parliamentary party group in the Bundestag has the general rule to reject all proposals from the opposition:

"It is not a surprise at all that motions from the opposition are rejected as a basic principle. They could present us the Ten Commandments, we would reject it. That is the way it is." (Interview Bundestag, 140114C)

**The Individual Legislator in the Policy-Making Process of the Dáil**

The Dáil offers an interesting contrast to the other legislatures analysed so far. In the Dáil, there is no strict distribution of specific responsibilities within the parliamentary party group like in the Tweede Kamer or in the Bundestag. When asked whether a TD would consider all legislation in an area or whether somebody does certain sub-themes, the TD argued:

12 "There is certainly a degree of an ’esprit de corps’ (German: Korpsgeist): ‘We as legislators specialising in traffic policy get less and less money’ (German: Wir Verkehrspolitiker kriegen immer weniger Geld)".
"No. You are free to decide as each issue comes along because one TD may have a particular interest in the [topic], or some may have interest in [another topic]. There is a degree of freedom." (Interview Dáil, 151209C).

During the committee stage there is also no system of formal reporting back to the parliamentary party group (Interview Dáil, 141202C) and also no formation of within-PPG work groups which would allow TDs of one parliamentary party group to talk to each other on how to act in committee. Legislators indicated that they have great freedom in committee.

"We are four members. I can only think of twice in the whole four years, where we would have come together. We are pretty free." (Interview Dáil, 141209C)

This is a stark contrast to the processes in the Tweede Kamer and in the Bundestag. With regard to the first group of actors ('rank-and-file' legislators from the same parliamentary party group who sit on the same committee) it can therefore be concluded that individual legislators are highly autonomous. Compared to the intricate system of division of labour and within-PPG work groups in the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer, the internal processes in the Dáil are puzzling. There is hardly any internal division of labour as no intermediate within-PPG work groups are established. The only exception is a system of within-PPG work groups which the parliamentary party group of Fine Gael has set up in the 31st Dáil as an innovation for this term.13 There are now 15 within-PPG work groups which mirror each of the 15 ministerial departments (Email Mark O'Doherty, Policy Adviser to the Government Chief Whip, 4th March 2015). So far, other parliamentary party groups have not established similar structures.

Even though these 'internal committees' appear to be similar institutions to those in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag, they are not. Their structure, as well as their purpose, is different. There is no fixed membership to these work groups; all parliamentary party group members are free to attend depending on their interest in the issue being discussed. This specific type of within-PPG work groups is used for two purposes. First, the short-term preparation of the TDs, i.e. to allow for a briefing from the minister before they would get into the public session; Second, they are used as a deliberative institution for the preparation of long-term policies or sharing of information. The process was characterised by an respondent as "ongoing policy formation and policy formulation" (Interview Dáil, 141202C).

This usage for information sharing is their primary purpose. In this sense these internal committees in the Fine Gael parliamentary party group clearly differ from their counterparts in the German and Dutch legislature. This can already be seen in the fact that they mirror the ministerial departments, but not the committee system of the Dáil. The internal work groups in the parliamentary party group of Fine Gael are mainly used for the deliberation of agenda items on the short-term. In the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer, the internal 'layers'  

13 They are referred to as "internal committees" during the interviews. In order to have terminological consistency, the term within-PPG work groups will be used.
are preparatory organs which provide additional checks and balances for the parliamentary party group.

**The Role of the Leadership in Dáil PPGs**

The lack of internal structures within parliamentary party groups has important ramifications for the room for manoeuvre of legislators. As there are no ‘fixed’ institutionalised patterns, the relationship of individual legislators with the other groups of actors outside of their own committee is also different. During the interviews it became apparent that a distinction needs to be made with regard to the proceedings regarding issues which fall under the right to take up on the committee’s own initiative and draw a report on (discretionary workload) on the one hand and the legislation send to the committee through the main chamber on the other.

When dealing with legislation, government TDs are under a relatively tight whip and already know what the position is before a proposal enters committee stage. This can most likely be ascribed to the fact that the committee stage in the legislative process of the Dáil is later than in the other two legislatures (after the general debate). A TD argued that, when the bill reaches the committee, it is almost too late to change anything, as the bill will have already been debated in the Dáil chamber before it went to the stage of the committee (Interview Dáil, 1412109C). This means that the position of the parliamentary party group on a bill has been established before it reaches committee stage. In case an issue arises for the government in committee "[...] the chief whip or someone close to him would approach those members on the committee and would help them understanding what line the committee was taking or get those members to help the government in committee" (Interview Dáil, 141203C). This is strong evidence that with regard to legislation a close interlocking between executive and government TDs exists. This is hinted at by the terminology used in the Dáil which follows from the monistic system of Ireland (No separation between the cabinet and parliament). The minister, rather than an specific legislator, is the spokesperson for a government party in a given policy area.

In committee, government TDs in the Dáil know the line of the executive. Committee members, who are government TDs, support the minister’s proposal. If the minister does not support the opposition’s amendments, then the legislators will also not support them (Interview Dáil, 141202B). Legislation is dealt with under a parliamentary party group whip. Such a spokesperson - minister relationship reverses the picture that was sketched by

---

14 (2) ‘rank-and-file’ legislators from the same parliamentary party group who do not sit on the same committee and (3) the leadership of the own parliamentary party group.

15 The Tweede Kamer is a case in which there is a clear separation of the government and the legislature (usually described as being a ‘dualist’ system). The Bundestag is also a monist system, as German ministers usually remain their seat in parliament. Germany has no regulations which prescribe the incompatibility of the parliamentary mandate with the ministerial office (Vilain & Wendel, 2015, p. 142). Dutch Ministers leave the parliamentary party group after being appointed as Ministers.
Dutch and German parliamentary party groups and resembles the partisan rationale of legislative organisation. Based on this rationale the role of the leadership is strengthened and committees are 'under the thumb' of a strong leadership.

However, this does not mean that the decision is simply dictated by the executive without any possibility to give feedback. The process of reconciliation of the position simply happens earlier and somewhere else. Interviewed government legislators indicated that there is a process of ongoing policy formation and policy formulation in the parliamentary party group meeting before policies are formulated (Interview Dáil, 141202C). They also highlighted the easy accessibility of ministers to legislators and Senators due to the structure that exists in the parliamentary party groups (Interview Dáil, 141208B), i.e. outside of committees. A policy would therefore "be formed in that sort of progressive way" (Interview Dáil, 150212C). An issue is discussed on a number of occasion in the parliamentary party group meeting where all legislators and ministers of the parliamentary party group are present. In case a government legislator would like to change something, the discussions with the ministers would therefore take place in this meeting and not in committee. It is of course possible for government TDs to table an amendment "if they feel that the legislation is not strong enough" (Interview Dáil, 141211A). In most cases, however, the discussions within the parliamentary party group would be preferred to this.

This means that when an issue comes to the committee the members of the parliamentary party group would already have been decided what they are going to do. There might be "certain tweaks and certain amendments and small changes, but the main bulk, the main drive of the policy stays as it is" (Interview Dáil, 141202B). The fact that ministers participate in the parliamentary party group meeting does not explain these differences with the Dutch and German case. Although there is a strict division in the Tweede Kamer and Dutch ministers usually do not participate in the parliamentary party group meetings in the Tweede Kamer, they do in Germany. Ministers attend these meetings on a regular basis (Patzelt, 2005, p. 257) and also participate in the discussions. It would therefore be too easy to conclude that this difference can be ascribed to the monistic system of the Irish political system and the dualist Dutch ‘way’, as processes in the Bundestag do not fit.

Opposition TDs in the Dáil are largely autonomous from their parliamentary party group in the positions they develop when dealing with legislation. They frequently, in some cases always (Interview Dáil, 141203E), table an amendment after the committee stage (report stage). These would, however, usually no be called for a formal vote. Rather, these amendments are given to the minister who would subsequently give reasons on why he or she disagrees (Interview Dáil, 141204B). There are instances, usually when a legislator feels very strongly about an issue, when opposition TDs call for a vote (Interview Dáil, 141205).

However, there is no feedback to the parliamentary party group with regard to the amendments comparable to the parliamentary party groups in the Tweede Kamer and the
For opposition TDs, there is a strong reliance on the spokesperson to determine the parliamentary party group policy and a general level of trust towards the spokesperson of a parliamentary party group. Even in case someone wants to be informed, this would not occur during the meetings of the parliamentary party group.

"I have no idea of the amendments of my colleague in the justice committee. We trust our colleague to know and if there is a big, big, big issue he will have talked to the leader and the leader’s adviser." (Interview Dáil, 141209C).

"Certainly in [my parliamentary party group] committee members would make his/her own decisions at committee-level. However, if they were unsure we would communicate with the parliamentary party group organisation." (Interview Dáil, 141211D)

This process is applicable to issues regarding legislation, the interviews also focused on the room for manoeuvre with regard to discretionary issues (issues the committee puts on its own agenda). Interestingly, legislators of both opposition parliamentary party groups and government parliamentary party groups indicated a level of freedom concerning these issues (Interview Dáil, 141211D). This freedom is frequently used in order to decide on which topics a report should be made. These reports have been used to address an issue in a constituency (Interview Dáil, 141209A) and led to a more ‘rewarding’ application of committee work. Legislators depicted several meetings in which outside groups would be brought in to address an issue of relevance to them. These can vary from inner-city problems such as raising the matter of on-street begging and the impact it has on tourism (Interview Dáil, 141204C) or other local issues, like rural post offices (Interview Dáil, 141209A).

A relatively new channel of influence, in which all parliamentary party groups participate, is the introduction of the pre-legislative scrutiny in 2011. This process allows for the scrutiny of draft legislation by the Irish parliament through committees before the legislation is formally submitted. The draft legislation is submitted to the parliament in general schemes (the 'heads of the bill'). After finishing their task, the committees report back to government before a final version of the bill gets drafted. This new process was seen as a significant development in how parliament and government interact. Respondents highlighted this new possibility of input as an additional power for committees (Interview Dáil, 141209C, also 141202C). Despite this added value, some legislators were critical about the pre-legislative scrutiny. They argued that in many instances there are not enough resources for the committees to scrutinize the heads of the bills (Interview Dáil, 141204C).

The Dynamic Between Government and Opposition MPs in the Dáil

A final issue is the relationship of individual legislators with ‘rank-and-file’ legislators from other parliamentary party groups who sit on the same committee. With regard to legislation
there was no evidence that partisan divisions are weakened during committees. Just like in the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer a clear division is upheld. The role of the opposition in discussions in committees was described as sharp and critical of government policies with "the opposition attacking the minister and all the government backbenchers on the committee defending the minister and saying that he or she is doing a great job" (Interview Dáil, 141204B). If the minister does not support the opposition amendments then the TDs of the government also do not support them (Interview Dáil, 141202B). Legislative reports usually clearly reflect the views of the majority. It was seen as "highly, highly unusual that a committee report would be critical of a government minister or of government policy" (Interview Dáil, 141205B). This sharp division and clear demarcation of opposition - government is also visible in the fact that, although the opposition usually drafts amendments, they do not call for votes as it is expected that they would be voted down by the government (Interview Dáil, 141201A, 141204B, 141209B).

Interestingly, the relationship of legislators outside of the committee stage of legislation is different. Instead of the clear government - opposition division, legislators of both sides argued that when it comes to pre-legislative scrutiny and to drafting of the reports, the atmosphere is much more collegial. Also all-party reports are more likely to emerge. One opposition TD argued that government TDs are "much freer to raise issues" (Interview Dáil, 141205B) during pre-legislative scrutiny. This statement about the group of TDs has to be interpreted with caution, of course, as it is made by an opposition TD. However, interviewed members of the government also argued that in those instances it is a "less adversarial kind of forum" (Interview Dáil, 141208B). In these instances with a consensual process, an interviewed opposition TD argued that "when it's working, it is parliament at its best" (Interview Dáil, 141214C).

A number of legislators pointed to more fundamental problematic elements with regard to the status of committees. The workload was seen as very high (Interview Dáil, 141204C; 141203E). Legislators face the need to balance the preparation of topics of debate but also other topics which TDs speak on, meeting different groups of people and the constituents. There is simply not enough time to really invest in committee work. Given the importance of the local sphere, the sometimes very technical content of committee work has little added value for a TD with regard to his or her constituents. Subsequently, it does not have a very high status and attendance is poor (Interview Dáil, 141204C; 141203E). One legislator was very blunt about this: "[...] I mean if the choice is between being at a committee meeting and your constituency, everybody would be in the constituencies" (Interview Dáil, 141204B).
Conclusion: An Informational Rationale to ’Keep the Sludge Moving’ versus Executive-Dominated Committees

The aim of this study was to uncover the relationship between an individual committee member and other actors within the legislature. The analysis was conducted on three legislatures, the Tweede Kamer, the Bundestag, and the Dáil. As other studies which have analysed committee workings, this study built on the congressional framework of distributional, informational and partisan theories of legislative organisation. Despite heightened interest there is not yet an ’own’ theoretical framework available comparable to the U.S. theories. The ’keeping tabs’ perspective, one of the few (if not the only) serious alternative to the congressional theories, was added to the theoretical framework. Some scholars have been sceptical about the merit of the congressional theories of legislative organisation and have called for an discontinuation of a heavy reliance on these theories. However, rather than developing a new framework, it was argued that the knowledge and insight gained from a long-standing research tradition on the U.S. Congress and U.S. state legislatures cannot be ignored and needs to be taken into consideration. Combining the rich literature on committees in the United States to the study of committees in parliamentary systems is sensible. The only serious alternative to the congressional theories, the ’keeping tabs’ perspective was a valuable addition to the theoretical framework. It added the role of coalition government situations which would otherwise not have been a prominent factor.

One of the central findings of this study is that the congressional theories, despite being developed against the backdrop of a particular legislature, have merit for the study of legislative organisation in other legislatures beyond the assignment issue. The concepts and expectations led to a deeper understanding of the processes in the analysed legislatures. The interviews in the three legislatures uncovered clear differences in the way that committees work. Two relatively distinct working procedures have been established: the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag on the one hand, the Dáil on the other.

In the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag the process corresponds very close to what is described by an informational rationale. To paraphrase Gilligan and Krehbiel (1990, p.535) committees are entities that ultimately are responsible to, and held accountable by their parent parliamentary party group. After first developing the position autonomously and cross-check it against a range of factors (e.g. the position that the parliamentary party groups have taken in the past), all legislators have to go through a system of scrutiny. At least one group of legislators has to be consulted which controls the legislator’s work. The groups do not come into action in any instance. However, every legislator from the parliamentary party group has the right to get more information on a topic. It is the responsibility of the interested non-spokesperson to gather information but the spokespersons also need to have a keen sense of who they will inform outside of their work group in order to prevent ‘unpleasant surprises’. The parliamentary party group leadership has an umbrella function.
and acts to prevent actions by the members in committee which might harm the party. The parliamentary party group meeting is in any instance the last hurdle a position has to overcome. The role that committees play is primarily instrumental: they are entities that are ultimately responsible to the parliamentary party group and held accountable by it. In this sense committees are clearly instrumental to ‘keep the sludge’ moving by dealing with the workload for the parliamentary party groups. Even if the issue is not discussed in-depth during the meeting of the parliamentary party group, the position needs to have majority appeal. Such a system ensures that the vast majority of policy choices reflect the wishes of the parliamentary party group. The parliamentary party group always remains the main principal and has a chance to ‘whistle a legislator back’.

The proceedings in the Dáil regarding issues the committees put on their own agenda follow a different logic than those regarding legislation. Legislators of all Irish parliamentary party groups, including those of the government coalition possess more autonomy in these matters. They are able to place issues on the agenda themselves and experience committee work as being much more rewarding in terms of output. The process in these issues is therefore best captured by a distributive rationale of committee proceedings. Without overstating the concepts: What happens in committee stays in committee. There is very little reporting back to the parliamentary party group and also much less intervention from the parliamentary party group leadership in the things that are done. This is applicable to all policy areas, not only those which are deemed to be highly important. There is, however, not much evidence that legislators in the Dáil make extensive use of putting issues on the agenda. Generally speaking, committee work is not very high on the priority list of legislators and they would rather spend time in their constituencies and do actual work there than working for their constituencies through committees. The possibilities to put own issues on the agenda and having substantial output on it are also limited. This might be put forward as reason why the parliamentary party group leadership might simply not care to be more active in those issues the committees put on their own agenda. When it comes to legislation, Irish committee members are under a tight whip and expected to support the spokesperson, i.e. the minister.

Present in all parliaments is the preservation of the government-opposition division in committee. The influence the opposition has is very limited in all parliaments. In that regard the prediction that committees loosen parliamentary party group boundaries cannot be confirmed. Although concessions are made to the opposition in terms of speaking time or when reports are drafted, discussions concerning draft legislation or motions are still characterised by a clear opposition versus government divide. Government legislators know very well that they can push their agenda through if it is deemed necessary. This is secured because the parliamentary party groups who form and support the government have a majority in committees.

What do these findings imply for the decision-making processes in the three analysed
legislatures? The evidence of this study presents a relatively clear answer to the question how committees work in the three legislatures. In terms of decision-making processes, committees in the Dáil are not designed to exert detailed scrutiny of government plans. Rather, the dynamics within committees point towards a situation in which the government dominates the parliament. When it comes to legislation, the capability to induce changes are limited, the committee stage is not supposed to be a major obstacle. Interviewed legislators also admitted that their work in committees, despite the fact that it is important, is subordinate to their constituency work.

Processes in the Tweede Kamer and the Bundestag hint at a more assertive legislature. These legislatures are organised to represent a credible counterpart towards the executive (although still subordinate compared to the U.S. Congress). In terms of democratic structures within the parliamentary party groups, the institutionalised patterns are reminiscent of a bureaucracy with clear rules, duties and rights. Even though the rules differ with regard to whether all issues are presented, the possibility to discuss issues with all other legislators exists. Legislators are wary about the effect that their actions might have and the attentiveness of their colleagues and the leadership. Rather than being closed networks of legislators who decide on issues autonomously, a system of collective intelligence and collective responsibility is ensured via a permanent process of feedback. This means that outcomes of the decision-making processes have, at least in principle, the protection of the will of the majority of legislators.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Studies

The current case selection of the Dáil, the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer has led to relatively distinct working mechanisms in each of the three legislatures. The driving argument behind the case selection was to choose a range of cases which differ with regard to the connection which individual legislators have towards districts. Although the baseline case selection, from which these cases were chosen, all have strong parliamentary party groups (compared to the U.S. Congress), there is some variation in the degree of influence within these cases. This is not accounted for in the case selection. The three chosen cases do not differ with regard to the grip that partisan forces have on their legislators. The current case selection of the Dáil, the Bundestag and the Tweede Kamer represent cases in which the strength of the central partisan organisation is clear. However, within the list of legislatures in the 'baseline' selection some legislatures are characterised by weaker influence of central partisan organisation. As an example, the Italian parliament, although still classified as a case with strong parliamentary party groups, is characterised by many intra-party factions which have a strong effect on how the parliamentary party group behaves (for more information, see Giannetti & Laver, 2005). Future research should also focus on these cases and determine whether they therefore resemble more closely the
practices in the U.S. Congress, or whether they resemble those processes depicted in this study. The results of this study will still be helpful to disentangle and place these other legislatures, even though the evidence cannot be transferred to those cases directly.

In general, this analysis was more concerned with the role of the 'regular' legislator in committee. The role of individual legislators is an often neglected factor in more macro-oriented studies of legislatures. The empowerment of these actors and the primary focus on them suits the goal of the analysis, but it leaves out those legislators who, within the process of legislative organisation, are differentiated in terms of 'hierarchy'. The first legislators who would come to mind are those who are referred to in this study as the leadership of the parliamentary party group. Although several legislators were interviewed which function as whips and (vice) chairs, the 'real' party leaders were, in most parliamentary party groups, not able to participate. Their voices are therefore not reflected in a similar way as the other legislators. Most interviewed legislators are 'rank-and-file' legislators. The insight they provided is invaluable input, but the number of interviewed chairs, let alone party leaders was not high. More specific research which focuses on their role is therefore needed. This will also provide more insight into the predictions of the 'keeping tabs' perspective.

Although the analysis has shown that the congressional theories work, this study did not lead to the formulation of a new theoretical model distinctively developed to the study of legislative organisation in parliamentary systems of government. The heavy reliance on the congressional theories is a strength of the analysis but also a weakness. It might be that the deduced rationales and the subsequent analyses do not convince a sceptical reader. One might argue that, despite the adaptations, the origin of the theories is such a unique institution precludes any application to other legislatures. To counter this criticism the deduced rationales are not far-fetched, even when premising that the congressional theories are not applicable. As an example, the strategy to monitor all issues which pass through committees is a perfectly valid strategy for strong parliamentary party groups.
References


