



## Comparative Assessment of Parliaments (CAP) Note

# Parties in Democratic National Assemblies

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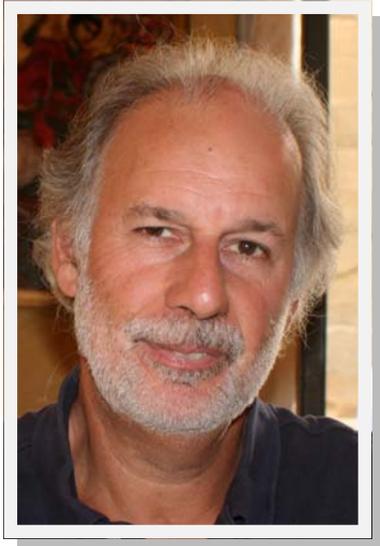
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### ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the analysis of democratic national assemblies is not only impossible without discussing political parties, but also incomprehensible without recognizing parties as the most significant organizations within them. Parties have structured political groupings and demands on government even before assemblies were democratically elected. And although parties may be in decline as institutions mediating between society and government in the current era, they remain significant as organizing forces within government. The paper first explains the origins of party organizations within parliaments by exploring why individual members and the assemblies taken as a whole need parties: what are their costs and benefits? It then describes the manner in which party organizations operate in different national assembly chambers. The third section analyses types and sources of party influence, including the role played by party leaders in manipulating legislative agendas, structuring Members' policy choices and shaping policy outcomes. The final section reviews how political scientists have sought to explain intra-party cohesion and discipline across different national assemblies.



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Contemporary democracy is “unthinkable save in terms of parties”, the American political scientist, E.E. Schnattschneider has noted. For over 200 years, political parties have been and remain the most important organizations in national assemblies across the democratic world. The vast majority of national assembly members are elected as members of political parties and once elected accept the benefits of joining and organizing political party caucuses or groups or blocs within the assembly; in a sample of 18 legislatures, less than one per cent of members were independents. “Party” not only impacts who is elected to the national assemblies but also how assembly members vote on legislation, structures those assemblies’ internal organization and procedures, has a significant influence on their relations with political executives, and impacts the kind of legislation they produce. Yet, parties are among the most complex political institutions within national assemblies primarily because they are so intrinsically and inextricably connected to electoral and legislative politics.

Why are parties so important in national assemblies?

To answer this question, we first need to ask why are national assemblies important. How did they come to be so important in democratic political systems? The simple answer is that political representatives elected to national assemblies, as well as political activists who helped elect them, saw them as useful vehicles to achieve certain political purposes. If this was not so, they would not exist.

National assemblies certainly existed in pre-democratic times – the senate in Ancient Greece and Rome, the Medieval English Parliament, Italian city-states’ popular assemblies – as they continue to do so in non-democratic societies. Some scholars claim the existence of similar institutions in non-Western cultures: for example, the Islamic *shura*, self-rule by members of a guild, a village, or an extended kinship group in Ancient India. It was, however, the rise to prominence of liberal ideas of represen-

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tation, associated with the European Enlightenment, which generated worldwide demands for representative assemblies that would hold monarchs and governments to account. Over the succeeding centuries, popular pressure led to demands that assembly members be democratically elected. That is, popular elections and other democratic features were grafted on to pre-democratic representative institutions. The consequence is contemporary representative democracy, which in varying degrees provides for institutional arrangements by which ordinary people (voters) are free to elect representatives to an assembly, who identify with competing groups of officeholders (parties) that promise to defend and promote their interests and decide issues of public policy on their behalf.

Parties emerged within national assemblies before those institutions were democratically elected – as parties in government. That is, the existence of assembly parties did not and does not depend on parties structuring voting in the electorate, for the simple reason that voters can only rely on party labels if those labels mean something, and the meaning that they possess will derive from a party's record in the assembly – what legislation the party has enacted and what other actions it has undertaken within the assembly. Within democratic politics, then, a party may be strong within the national assembly but weak in organizing the electorate. If it is weak in the assembly, however, it is also likely to be weak in the electorate.

The first part of this paper explains the demand for – and therefore the origins of – party organizations within parliaments and legislatures. Why do individual national assembly members need political parties? Why do parliaments and legislatures – as collective entities – need parties? What are the costs as well as the benefits of political parties in national assemblies? The second part examines how parties organize different national assembly chambers while the third part analyses types and sources of party influence, including the role played by party leaders in creating and manipulating legislative agendas, structuring assembly members' policy choices, and shaping policy outcomes. A final section reviews how political scientists have sought to explain intra-party cohesion and discipline across different national assemblies.

## Why Legislative Parties?

Legislative political parties are essentially collective devices that serve the mutual interests of political candidates and representatives, political activists, and voters. If ordinary people are to be offered genuine choices in democratic elections and are free to elect representatives who will promote and defend their interests and decide issues of public policy on their be-

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half, they need information on policy issues salient to voters and the national interest, as well as a range of choices of candidates for office. Commonality of policy issues and issue positions or identities will then serve to structure voters' electoral choices while those who share common policy positions or identities – locally, regionally, or nationally – will have strong incentives to try to organize efforts to influence the electorate and structure voters' choices so that those candidates that are eventually elected will share a common interest in promoting and defending a particular set of interests and values. Over the course of the nineteenth century, democratic demands for a wider voting franchise in Britain, for example, eventually led to a much larger and more representative electorate, which in turn required the previously aristocratic parliamentary parties to publish election manifestoes and create party organizations outside Parliament in order to garner support from a more representative cross section of the British (male) electorate. As party organizations expanded outside Parliament, Britain's party system changed as new parties formed that more accurately represented voters' values and interests, which in turn led rank-and-file activists in those parties demanding greater influence over who would be nominated to bear the party's label in elections, which issues the Member of Parliament (MP) would raise at Westminster, and how the representative would vote in the parliament/legislature.

The existence of political parties benefits both national assemblies as institutions and individual candidates for office and assembly members.

### *The Benefits of Legislative Party Membership for Legislative Institutions*

Representative assemblies undertake complex and important work. They often have large numbers of members who need to fulfill a number of competing obligations within usually busy work schedules. If these institutions are to perform their representative, lawmaking, and monitoring functions, their members need to resolve some significant collective action and social choice problems. In short, *how will these assemblies will be organized?* Parties are the primary means by which most democratic national assemblies are organized, as even assembly representatives antipathetic to political parties, such as in the United States, soon realized.

Without formal or informal organizations within a democratic national assembly, each representative would reasonably demand equal parliamentary rights, and equal access to debate and legislative time. The inevitable outcome would be that any single member could block any legislation with which he/she disagreed, while at the same time he/she could not easily push for legislative action on his/her own proposals or cut off an-

other member's filibuster. In short, legislative action would require unanimity rather than majority voting while members' capacities to negotiate or bargain with one another, agree "log-rolls" or reciprocal arrangements – you support my motion and I will support yours later – or divide up legislative labor and/or subject specialization would also be extremely limited. Closing a legislative deal would be difficult if not impossible, as the separate parties to a putative deal could not guarantee that the assembly taking final action on their respective bills would consummate the deal. In the absence of agreed regulatory procedures, moreover, the assembly would also have no way of distinguishing between time allowed for members' speeches, when they would likely exploit their opportunities to promote constituency interests, and time for legislating bills and public policy. In short, the assembly would simply become a "talking shop" that produced no laws.

Some assembly member or group of members (leaders), or some internal institution or set of institutions within the assembly (leadership), needs to resolve these collective action problems by coordinating an assembly chamber's activities, *agenda*, some minimal level of reciprocity and trust among representatives, and institute a set of rules and procedures that engenders coordination, and regulates debate and proceedings. Particularly if the assembly is large, divisions and specializations of labor must also be instituted. Accepting these requirements, however, means that members must delegate power to others to perform these tasks and fulfill the chamber's representative, lawmaking, and monitoring functions; and that those to whom they delegate power will necessarily enjoy greater power and authority than any individual chamber member. In most democratic assemblies, it is political parties and their leaders that perform these central organizing roles.

Political parties not only play the primary role in resolving national assemblies' collective action problems, they also channel social choices. Assemblies are supposed to represent ordinary people – the voters – in a democratic society. Assembly parties help to articulate and aggregate the various interests in society. However, the extent to which they perform these functions – and thus their strength within the assembly in structuring behavior – varies considerably.

### *The Benefits of Legislative Party Membership for Individual Legislators*

Political parties benefit assembly members as well as the assembly as an institution. Indeed, the benefits that accrue to individual assembly members from affiliation with a political party are much more significant in explaining the roles parties play in assemblies than the benefits to the assembly as an institution.

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When a candidate seeks election or re-election to the national assembly, his/her chances of winning are typically much greater if he/she affiliate with a political party. In closed list multi-member PR systems – such as those used for elections to the Argentine *Cámara de Diputados*, the Austrian *Nationalrat*, the Czech *Poslanecka Snemovna*, the Danish *Folketing*, the German *Bundestag*, the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, the Norwegian *Storting*, the Swedish *Riksdag*, the South African National Assembly, or the Venezuelan *Asamblea Nacional* – there is little choice but to join a party. Once a politician becomes a member of a party in such systems, his/her assembly career becomes heavily dependent on party leaders who exercise centralized control over nomination procedures and decide whether and where incumbent legislators and other party candidates are placed on the party's electoral list. Candidates who not members of one of the main parties are effectively excluded even in open list- or non-proportional systems. Generally, an assembly candidate will only be advantaged by not identifying with a party in emerging democratic systems or in established party systems that become unstable.

Once elected or re-elected, the vast majority of assembly members stick with their party. Candidates and assembly members are essentially *purposeful* in that they wish to pursue a combination of goals that include winning *re-election*, acquiring *power and influence*, and enact *good public policy*. In order to achieve their personal goals, most see advantages in structured collective action through a party group, caucus or bloc of like-minded chamber members, especially if that group forms the majority.

Parties provide individual assembly members with instant access to and identification with a *brand*. As in business, the primary role of brands is to facilitate differentiation among similar products, although the value of a brand extends well beyond this basic function. Political parties exert a similar role to brands. They provide substantive and symbolic bundles of meaning that help potential candidates (and voters) differentiate among the parties, epitomize the core identity of a party, and instill personality traits with which they and voters can identify. Effectively, candidates and voters use heuristics to gauge how different parties deal with particular political issues, and associate different parties with certain personality traits or values. Typically, many major political parties in democratic systems differentiate their brands in terms of different conceptions of good public policy. So, for example, values associated with the British Labour Party include social justice, fairness, strong public services, internationalism, and rights matched by responsibilities whereas the Conservative Party identifies with traditional values and institutions, individual freedom, enterprise and opportunity, low taxation, and the maintenance of a strong society based on families, community, and nation. Similar brand distinc-

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tions are evident in other European left and right parties as well as in Australia and Canada. Denominational or religious-based parties, such as European Christian Democratic parties, the Turkish *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (AKP) or the Indian *Bharatiya Janata Party* similarly differentiate their brand in terms of good public policy.

A party's brand may also identify with an *ethnic* group or coalition of groups, which typically eschews integration into a broader national identity. Established democratic national assemblies have long included representatives of ethnic parties. The Belgian parliament, for example, includes MPs from the separatist *Nieuw-Vlaamse Alliantie*, which claims to represent Flemish speakers, as well as the *Parti Socialiste* and the *Mouvement Réformateur*, which claim to represent the French-speaking Walloons. The Canadian *Bloc Québécois*, the *Ukrainian Russian Bloc Party* and the Indian *Akali Religious Party* are other examples. Since the end of the Cold War, a much larger number of ethnic-based parties have won representation in their national assemblies, notably in Europe (e.g. Romania's *Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România*), South America (e.g. Bolivia's *Movimiento al Socialismo-Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos*), Africa (e.g. South Africa's *Inkatha Freedom Party*), and Asia (e.g. the Tamil National Alliance in Sri Lanka). Religious fundamentalist parties, such as Israel's *Mafdal* (National Religious Party) and caste-affiliated parties (such as India's *Bahujan Samaj Party*), often share the same particularistic approach. Indeed, some commentators see such parties' representation in the national assembly as detrimental to democratic processes and institutions, and sometimes advocate their prohibition. Others, however, argue that the presence of ethnic and religious parties in national assemblies may actually help promote democratic practice, provided such parties are more committed to cooperation and political bargaining within the assembly rather than pursuing their particular world-view at the expense of all other considerations, and provided the assembly chamber's internal institutions encourage such "responsible" behavior.

Increasingly, many parties represented in national assemblies have become elite-based "electoral-professional" or *electoralist* organizations – underlining the earlier point that assembly parties may be strong at the same time that their electoral bases may be weak. Electoralist parties are organizationally thin throughout the host society but have extensive highly professionalized offices and staffs at the national level, both in the national assembly, supporting their leaderships, and in the party bureaucracy at election time, when they spring into action to perform their primary function of conducting a national campaign to win election or re-election. In election campaigns, they are much less interested in identify-

ing themselves with a particular set of values or brand and often stress the personal attractiveness of their candidates at the expense of other considerations]. When necessary, they make vague policy commitments that often shift with the public's mood and employ political marketing professionals who use "modern" campaign methods that usually rely heavily on television and other mass-communications media rather than on the mobilization of party members and affiliated organizations. In its purest form, the electoralist party is also a *personalistic* party whose primary rationale is to provide a vehicle for the leader to win an election and form a government. Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia*, Néstor and Cristina Kirchner's Peronist *Partido Justicialista*, Indira Gandhi's Congress-I, Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party, Kim Dae-Jung's Millennium Democratic party (South Korea), and Thaksin Shinawatra's *Puea Thai* party are good examples. In many (less stable) aspiring democratic systems, such national assembly parties are also likely to comprise followers of present or past political leaders and/or alliances of local leaders who depend heavily for their political support on kinship groups. In Lebanon, for example, *Hizballah* recruits many of MPs from the party's satellite institutions, especially different schools located in the party's areas of political influence. In Pakistan and much of south Asia, too, assembly parties are often identified with political dynasties and comprise alliances of local leaders whose support is based on kinship groups.

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Assembly parties provide their members with potentially significant *legislative resources and efficiency gains*, including taking responsibility for significant and otherwise costly coordination tasks and resolving various collective action problems, which are delegated to party leaders and party organizations. This leadership or coordination premium includes organizing the legislative chamber, selecting leaders, convening meetings with other legislators, developing policy positions, shaping a legislative agenda, providing voting cues, aggregating and resolving different policy preferences within the party. Often, government funding is available to legislative parties for these coordination and leadership tasks.

While national assemblies allocate personal staff and travel budgets of various sizes to their members on an institutional rather than a party basis, individual members of a chamber often receive additional resources from their chamber parties, including opportunities to be selected or elected to committee and leadership positions, which are especially significant if the party is the majority or part of a majority coalition. Indeed, in almost all democratic assemblies, parties provide the *only* viable route to committee and central party leadership positions within the national assembly. Parliamentary systems assign cabinet positions exclusively to members of the majority party or coalition. Independent members do not usually enjoy these benefits, even in chambers where they represent a sub-

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stantial proportion of the overall membership, such as the Russia *Duma*. Other chambers impose minimum thresholds – expressed as percentage of the total number of members – before members may qualify for nomination to a leadership position in the chamber.

A member of an assembly party may also use the party's brand and resources (where available) explicitly to enhance his/her *re-election prospects*. All members of the legislative party accrue the benefits of a party brand regardless of whether they have contributed materially to collective efforts to create or sustain it; indeed, individual party members' incentives for contributing their fair share to collective party efforts are actually small. National, regional or fractional party organizations and leaders often also provide party candidates on an individual or pooled basis with electorally useful resources, including publicity and propaganda (particularly on television), policy and political research, opinion polling, staff assistance, and money. Meanwhile, those in committee or leadership positions may exploit their positions to enhance their influence within the chamber and for additional electoral benefits by ... dispensing patronage or largess. Indeed, chamber parties often devise mechanisms that encourage chamber office-holders to do so, as in the Chilean *Cámara de Diputados* and *Senado* where party leaders rotating important committee and leadership positions so that a larger number of party or coalition members may hold committee presidencies or seats on their chamber's governing board at some time during the legislative session. Here, as elsewhere, chamber party leaders have also developed hierarchical committee systems that help chamber members develop policy expertise, which in turn may assist their efforts to win re-election.

### *The Costs of Legislative Party Membership for Individual Legislators*

While individual members accrue significant benefits from assembly party membership, they also incur substantial *transaction costs*, which increase proportionally the greater the distance between the individual legislator's policy preferences and his/her party's median point, the further the party's median point is from the median point of his/her party's activists or constituency voters, and the greater the unpopularity of the executive/president or government/legislative majority party at the time.

Seeking to limit his/her involvement in the cumbersome, divisive, and expensive agreement-reaching processes within the chamber party, and the party's need to satisfy large swathes of the electorate that are unrepresentative of the individual legislators local constituency, an assembly member might opt instead for an *individualist or factional* representational

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strategy, if for no other reason than winning re-election. In the middle decades of the twentieth century, for example, such strategies were common among many US Congress members who perceived benefits in distancing themselves from their national parties in order to accommodate local constituency preferences. Besides, central parties may not provide party members in the assembly with many campaign resources. Voters' ignorance of their representatives' behavior in the assembly chamber and a penchant for the member's locality to focus primarily or exclusively on local rather than national issues may also undermine the importance of an assembly member's close attachment to his/her national party. Opting for this strategy, then, the assembly member might maintain a nominal affiliation with his/her national party but will concentrate his/her efforts on building a personalistic proto-political organization for re-election, and on compensating supporters in his/her geographic constituency directly and selectively by distributing pork barrel benefits and political patronage on a non-partisan or party fraction basis.

In strong party systems, the strategy of distancing him/herself from national assembly party leaders may not be a realistic option because of various kinds of contractual disciplinary requirements. European parliamentary socialist parties typically include an obligation on their national assembly representatives in their standing orders to support the party position. The highly disciplined parties in the post-Communist Polish *Sjem* reinforce this obligation with the threat of expulsion from the party. Parties in the Canadian House of Commons oblige their MPs to regard every legislative vote as a vote of confidence on the Government, although leaders only designate certain votes as such. Party leaders further deter dissent by requiring that they sign party candidates' nomination papers for a General Election. Within single-party cabinets, government ministers – the “payroll vote” – must toe the party line or expect to resign. When the government is a coalition of parties, however, as in many continental European parliamentary systems, for example, complex risk calculations often constrain party leaders' capacity to enforce discipline: too strict party discipline will induce chamber members to quit the party, thereby possibly threatening the Government's existence. Still, parliamentary parties in Canada – where single-party government is the norm – have expelled a small number of MPs for casting dissenting votes. Party discipline in Australia is even tighter. After splitting in its early years, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) introduced the cast-iron discipline that it still enforces. ALP legislators must sign a formal pledge that binds them to vote as their caucus directs and is reinforced by a prohibition on individual legislative candidates raising money directly for their re-election campaigns; all campaign funds de-

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rive exclusively from the party. Not surprisingly, dissent in these strong party systems is rare.

So is switching to another party. In Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, and most west European systems where party brands are strong, switchers lose the party's nomination and their seats; either immediately or at the next election, unless some fudge is agreed since assembly members are perceived almost exclusively as *party* representatives and elected to the assembly as such. In these systems, the transaction costs of switching exceed those of remaining in the party. Thus, just 31 British MPs switched parties between 1950 and 1996, just 20 members of the United States House and Senate between 1947 and 1997, only four Canadian MPs between 1997-2000, five members of the Norwegian *Storting* in the 1990s, and no members of the Finnish *Eduskunta*. National assemblies in Argentina, India, Israel, Portugal, and Thailand legally prohibit their members from switching parties.

Absent legal prohibition and following purposive logic, legislators switch to another party when they perceive that their goals are not well served by their existing partisan affiliation and they perceive the transaction costs of switching to be lower than those incurred by remaining in their current party. Thus, between 1996 and 1999, more than 100 Italian MPs switched parties, some of them several times. In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of southern conservative Democrats in the US Congress switched to the Republican Party, which was more in line with their policy preferences. However, as the experience in the emerging democratic legislatures of eastern and central Europe show, many party switches are to parties within the same ideological “family” or major coalition groups. Less prosaically, assembly members may also switch parties to gain pork and/or patronage from a new governing coalition and/or increase their chances of re-election by affiliating with a more popular party. Democratic Party hegemony in their region throughout most of the twentieth century, and the resultant benefits accrued from superior access to federal largess and policy influence previously deterred southern conservative Democrats in the US from switching to the Republican Party (with which they had greater ideological affinity). Once, however, Republican voting increased across the US, including in the south, increased threatening their re-election as Democrats, the transaction costs associated with switching decreased and the incidence of switching increased accordingly. Another party's more advantageous electoral rules may similarly provide incentives for party switching, as experience in Brazil, for example, has demonstrated.

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where electoral support for parties is volatile, where parties are weakly institutionalized and provide very few electoral resources, where conflictual relations between executive and legislatures inhibit party responsibility, and where legislators are guaranteed nomination for re-election even if they switch parties. The phenomenon has been particularly strong in the Brazilian *Câmara dos Deputados* and *Senado*, the Colombian *Cámara de Representantes*, the Ecuadorian *Congreso*, the post-Suharto Indonesian *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*, the post-apartheid South African National Assembly, and in a host of post-communist chambers in the Baltic, Russia and eastern and central Europe where “faction hopping” or “parliamentary tourism” has been rife over recent decades. In one case, a Czech MP changed his party affiliation three times in the space of just one year. Still, party switching also occurs in older democratic assemblies that become unstable as party brands weaken – as, for example, in the early post-Nazi German *Bundestag*, the Indian *Lok Sabha*, the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* and the *Senato*, the Japanese Diet, and the Israeli *Knesset*.

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## Party Organization in National Assemblies

Without the organization and coordination that political parties bring to electoral and legislative politics, national assemblies would experience political fragmentation and government instability, as the previous discussion showed. Parties organize national assembly chambers, select chamber officers and committees, select their own officers, and raise and resolve organizational and procedural questions.

### *Limits on the Number of Assembly Parties*

Either by historical accident or by institutional design, most political systems – especially those with proportional representation voting systems – use electoral rules and legal restrictions to restrict the number of parties represented in the assembly. Both France and Germany adopted constitutional provisions that limited the number of parties in the *Assemblée Nationale* and the *Bundestag* after the Second World War. The most common rule requires parties to obtain a certain percentage of the popular vote (usually between two, as in Israel, and five percent, as in Poland and Germany) in order to qualify for assembly seats. These systems place greater value on limiting political fragmentation and the risks of political instability that might follow from one party or coalition of parties not controlling a majority of seats in the assembly at the expense of permitting representation of minor parties. The Turkish *Büyük Millet Meclisi* requires an even higher threshold of 10 per cent. As a result, only three

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out of 27 parties contesting the 2011 elections actually won seats in the assembly. Had the threshold been just five percent, six parties would have won seats in the assembly. Similar effects are evident in post-Cold War Russia and Ukraine. Australia's single transferable proportionally representative voting system produces similar effects while avoiding the need for a vote threshold. To win a set in Parliament, MPs need to obtain a high quota percentage from small multi-member electorates, which return fewer MPs.

In political systems without vote thresholds, electoral rules – often reinforced by political traditions and socialization – serve to limit the number of effective legislative parties. Thus, it is generally accepted that simple majority/first the post voting systems favor large, nationally-organized parties that are able to appeal to voters in constituencies across the country and hence win many seats, and discriminate against smaller or regional parties. In such systems, voters reason that if they wish to vote for a party that will form the government, their choices are effectively limited to one of two main parties. Political scientists have called this principle Duverger's Law. Britain and the US are both examples of this kind of system with the result that both have two-party systems that discriminate strongly against smaller parties. Whereas in the US, these electoral dynamics are reinforced in some states by vote thresholds that parties must reach in order to contest the next general election, in Britain, numerous smaller parties actually achieve representation in Parliament, especially if their voting support is concentrated in specific geographic areas. A similar pattern has developed in Canada. Even so, there is no iron law determining either that only two parties will be represented in these assemblies, nor is there any guarantee that one of those parties will be able to form a majority government.

### *Parties and Assembly Presiding Officers*

Almost every democratic national assembly elects its own presiding officer – a speaker, chairperson, or chamber president – who presides over its plenary sessions and represents the institution formally in its relations with other governmental institutions at home and abroad. However, the extent of legislative party involvement in the choice and the behavior of presiding officers vary. Non-partisan presiding officers, such as those in the British or Canadian House of Commons, the Indian *Lok Sabha* and the Israeli *Knesset* are elected by the entire chamber, do not need to resign from their party but do not adopt a deliberative role, and are not necessarily replaced when a new chamber majority is elected. Nonetheless, assembly party leaders sometimes seek to influence MPs' choices for the position, and sometimes – as in the *Lok Sabha* – the officeholder exhibits distinctly partisan behavior.

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Commonly, presiding officers are also partisan leaders chosen by the assembly's majority party or coalition and are expected to advance the majority's policy and political goals as well as preside over the chamber. Maintaining the delicate balance between these tasks, however, sometimes results in blatantly partisan procedural rulings that are likely to prove controversial. Still, in some assemblies, partisan speakers do not exercise many significant powers. So, for example, a presiding officer may have formal authority to set the assembly's legislative agenda – and actually may influence the agenda by his/her rulings – but, as in assemblies with nonpartisan presiding officers, agenda-setting is firmly in the hands of the governing coalition or party, as in the Australian and US House of Representatives. In a number of Latin American national assembly chambers, however, including those of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, and Uruguay, the chamber president or directorate decides the agenda on a consensual basis while in chambers in Argentina, Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela, the agenda is set jointly by the chamber's directorate and a steering committee comprising party leaders.

Similarly, a presiding officer's powers to assign bills to particular committees and/or choose voting procedures on bills varies: parliaments in Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and the European Union give bill assignment authority to the presiding officer whereas those in Australia, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK and the US do not. Presiding officers in the French and Italian parliaments and the US House of Representatives also have discretion in choosing the assembly's voting procedure whereas those in Germany, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the UK do not. Clearly, the degree of autonomous authority granted to and utilized by presiding officers may affect the majority party/coalition's ability to enact its legislative agenda.

### *Seating of Parties on the Assembly Floors*

Party also affects the seating arrangements in national assembly chambers. Most adopt a circular or semi-circular arrangement. Following a tradition instituted by the first national assembly during the French Revolution, when members divided into supporters of the king and sat to the presiding officer's right and the Revolution's supporters to his left, and the persistence of binary divisions of political issues, most chambers have emulated these arrangements. The exceptions are the Westminster parliaments of Britain, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa, where Government and Opposition parties face one another on two sets of benches within a long rectangular hall. Irrespective of a chamber's

shape, however, assembly members sit with their party colleagues not only in the plenary but also committee sessions.

### *Party Leadership Selection*

Parties address social choice and collective action problems. They give chambers policy direction. How they elect or select their leaders is therefore a significant question.

In parliamentary systems, the prime minister or leader of the cabinet is the leader of the largest party in the chamber that determines which party or parties forms the Government – usually the so-called “lower” house. An exception to this rule is the current Indian prime minister who is a member of the *Rajya Sabah* not the *Lok Sabah*. In separated or presidential systems, the president will usually be regarded as his/her party’s national leader but he/she may be required to contend with other leaders of his party in the national assembly. In some of the strong centralized party systems in Latin America, however, a party leader holding a post outside the assembly may effectively compete with the president of the same party for influence with the party’s representatives in the assembly, or exercise influence over assembly party leaders when the party does not control the presidency, particularly in the run-up to a presidential re-election. When a party does not control the presidency, moreover, party leaders in the respective assembly chambers will compete with one another, and possibly with other leaders outside the assembly. In Brazil, the designation of party leaders is made even more complex by the country’s president being entitled to appoint a so-called “government leader” in the *Câmara dos Deputados*, whose role is to communicate the president’s policy preferences on legislative measures to the chamber’s party leaders and members and negotiate with them.

How assembly party leaders are chosen varies across different systems. Exclusively party members inside each assembly chamber choose some while the entire party (inside and outside the assembly) makes the choice in other systems, and the person chosen may not even be a member of the national assembly at the time of selection. Not surprisingly, the method of leadership election or selection will affect their relations with competing power centers within the party inside and outside the assembly.

Until relatively recently, most chamber parties in established democratic systems used somewhat exclusive and opaque methods to choose their leaders. Leaders of the British Conservative Party, for example, used to “emerge” from informal opaque processes within the party and their “election” rubber-stamped by a joint meeting of members of Commons

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and Lords and prospective parliamentary candidates; party members outside the assembly did not participate in the selection process and were not formally consulted. Even today, party members in many chambers choose their leaders exclusively – usually from an available pool of candidates of cabinet or shadow cabinet ministers – with no formal participation by party activists or voters, including both main parties in the Australian, New Zealand, and US Houses of Representatives and Senates, the Liberal Party in Danish *Folketinget*, both main parties in the Irish *Dáil*, Democrats in the Japanese Diet, and the *Christen-Democratisch Appèl* in the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*. Likewise, party representatives in their assembly chamber remove party leaders exclusively – as British Conservatives replaced Margaret Thatcher in 1990 and US House Republicans replaced Speaker Newt Gingrich in 1998; in the former case, moreover, Thatcher’s successor formed a new government without a General Election.

Yet, the trend in party leadership selection across many contemporary assemblies has been toward much wider *selectorates*, ranging from conventions to open primaries. Selection by party conventions, conferences, congresses or assemblies similar to US presidential nominating conventions has been common in Canada since the early twentieth century while its introduction in continental Europe is very recent. In practice – as with leaders chosen exclusively by chamber representatives – most leaders selected by party conventions have already embarked on careers in the assembly and, if their party had been recently in government, have generally usually also served in cabinet. Few candidates without assembly experience actually seek the party leadership, and when they do, they attract little support. In the event that a party chooses a leader from outside the assembly, he/she subsequently becomes a member of the assembly.

A second increasingly common method used by the main British and Canadian parties, the *Parti Québécois* and the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party provides for wider rank-and-file participation by party members. In its purest form, the entire party membership inside and outside the assembly elect the leader on the basis of one (party) member one vote (OMOV), as in parliamentary parties in Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, and Portugal. Italy’s left coalition bloc (*l’Unione*) went one step further in 2005 when Romano Prodi was selected as leader in an open primary in which all Italian citizens as well as immigrants of at least three years standing could vote. Many commentators, however, have questioned whether wider selectorates for leadership elections has been motivated more by central leaders’ wishes to reduce party activists’ influence in order to centralize policymaking power within the party. One other effect of wider enfranchisement has been to reduce the premium previously placed on assembly leaders having served long apprenticeships. When the Canadian Pro-

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gressive-Conservative Party chose Brian Mulroney as leader by national convention in 1983, he had never held any elective office while Liberal Michael Ignatieff chosen, as party leader in 2008 had been an MP for just two years. Although both main British political parties require their leaders to be MPs already, David Cameron had served only four years while Ed Miliband had served only just five years in Parliament before becoming party leaders. Nevertheless, all these cases raise questions as to whether party leaders without substantial assembly experience might not have the appropriate credentials to lead their parties effectively in the national assembly.

Yet, the trend to wider participation in the choice of national assembly leaders is by no means universal. Apart from many national assembly party contingents retaining control of leadership selection, in many of the highly centralized party government systems in Latin America, the effective leaders of a party are located outside the national assembly. In Mexico, for example, the party leader is head of the national executive committee and individual party members in the *Cámara de Diputados* have little influence over who becomes chair of the party's delegation in their chamber. Elsewhere, as in Brazil, the choice of party leader in the national assembly is subject to the influence of the president if he is of the same party. In 2005, for example, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva campaigned successfully to replace the speaker of the *Câmara dos Deputados* who had opposed his policies. In France too, the president appoints the prime minister although he/she must reflect the majority in the *Assemblée Nationale*. Needless to say, leaders of personalistic parties who are not members of the national assembly, exercise influence over those who lead the party inside the chamber(s) of the national assembly.

Logic might suggest that national assembly leaders might be ideological centrists within their parties. Conversely, where leaders are chosen by wider selectorates outside the assembly, they might be expected to represent the more “extreme” elements in their parties – left or liberal in left-wing parties, conservative in right-wing parties. Yet, when assembly members – who have been more closely exposed to the candidates – choose their party leaders, ideology is likely to be only one of a number of factors determining their choice, including competence in other party leadership positions, communication skills, popular appeal, and their region. Much also depends on the range of candidates on offer, the number of candidates, and the relative ideological concentrations and coordinating abilities of competing factions. The case of the election of the ideologically extreme Margaret Thatcher as Conservative Party leader is a case in point. Thatcher was the only credible candidate willing to take on the existing leader, and won. Moreover, where parties weakly structure assembly members' behavior and parties are electorally competitive, as-

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sembly party's may perceive a strategic advantage in selecting an "extreme" party leader who will enhance the credibility of that party's threat to let inter-party negotiations break down unless a settlement favorable to that party is reached.

### *Party Leadership*

Chamber party leaders lead groups of like-minded members in pursuing partisan goals, including promoting and supporting their party's program or policy priorities, formulating and advancing a legislative agenda reflecting those priorities, establishing a legislative record of achievement, generating tangible benefits for the party's voters, and winning election or re-election at the polls. At the same time, chamber leaders must manage the often-uneasy relationship with their party colleagues inside the chamber, including legislative committees and their chairs, as well as with party colleagues outside – one of which may be the president or another important party leader outside the assembly – and with the other chamber within a bicameral system. How much power they exercise and the nature of their relationship with other assembly party members will vary, of course, across systems and over time.

To assist them in pursuing their goals and undertaking these tasks, chamber party leaders have acquired substantial organizational and financial support – usually publicly funded. In its earliest form, which dates from the eighteenth century in the British parliament, support comprised party whips appointed to ensure that as many party members as possible attended the chamber to vote, and voted for the party line. (The term derives from hunting with dogs, as in "whipping the hounds"). "Remember", a former British Cabinet minister once insisted, "the British Cabinet's concern today is not for its majority over the Opposition, because that is almost automatic but for its majority inside its own Party. The key to power is *inside* the Party." Over the course of the twentieth century, whip operations have expanded greatly in all national assemblies: Britain's current Conservative-Liberal Democratic coalition has 17 whips in the Commons, including eight assistants. In the contemporary US House of Representatives almost 30 per cent of majority Republicans are members of the party's whip operation, including 17 appointed deputy whips and almost 50 regionally elected assistant whips. Chambers in Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa also have whip operations. As their operations expanded in these and other chambers, whips began to assist leaders in gauging intra-chamber party opinion before a vote, monitor chamber party opinion, distribute information on the legislative timetable, provide policy information to chamber party members, liaise with the leader over parliamentary business arrangements with

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other parties, as well as ensuring a majority for the party leadership on an assembly vote. Even in national assemblies without formal whips, there has been a significant expansion of party leadership positions, offices and staffs as assembly party members have been willing to delegate more powers to their chamber's party leaders and leaders have created new leadership positions as part of their efforts to bind individual party members to their party. The overall effect has been to strengthen party influence and to enhance the party's inclusiveness.

### *Party Caucuses, Groups, and Blocs*

It is, of course, assembly chamber party caucuses, groups, or blocs that usually elect and delegate powers to chamber party leaders (including committee chairs in some chambers) to establish a party's policy priorities, publicize important issues, resolve internal party differences between factions, and develop strategies for passing legislation important to the party. These party organizations were already evident in nineteenth century assemblies, notably in the US Congress.

The dynamics of the relationship between caucuses/groups and party leaders varies considerably across different systems and chambers, and changes over time. The Westminster-type systems in Australia and Britain as well as some of the Latin American presidential systems, for example, exhibit a top-down leadership-member relationship, although the possibility that chamber party meetings will sometimes assert themselves against their own leaders and demand greater decision-making influence, inclusiveness and party democracy cannot be excluded. Many continental European chamber parties, however, permit more active backbench member involvement in party policymaking and the preparation of legislation, which typically serves to solidify party unity and cohesive voting, resolve inter-factional differences, and reinforces links with the party outside parliament. In separated or presidential systems, assembly caucuses or blocs may become arenas for developing party strategy and policy priorities in the assembly, but their decisions are not necessarily binding on assembly party members and may be subject to significant countervailing presidential influence if he/she is a member of the same party.

Chamber party members may institutionalize their meetings to varying degrees with elected officers and regular meetings. Probably, the oldest party organization – aside from the whips – is the Democratic-Republican Caucus in the US House of Representatives (now the House Democratic Caucus), which claims its origins to 1796 when a group of House members combined to oppose a treaty with Britain and, from that date until 1820, actually nominated presidential candidates (and

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eventual presidents). It was not until the early twentieth century that factionalized Senate Democrats followed suit, elected a chair and a secretary, agreed to keep regular minutes of its proceedings, and took steps toward adopting of a "binding rule". While British parties began organizing support outside Parliament in the nineteenth century, it was not until the twentieth century that they began to organize within Parliament, beginning with the Labour Party, which motivated by its commitment to intra-party democracy instituted elected officers and regular meetings in 1906. British Conservatives organized their 1922 Committee, which specifically excluded government ministers two decades later following a revolt against their government’s policies. The twentieth century witnessed similar developments in other democratic assemblies, in the case of Australia’s Federal Labor Caucus preceding the British Parliamentary Labour Party. Meetings may be weekly – as for the 1922 Committee, the Republican Conference in the US House, and parties in the German *Bundestag* and the Swedish *Riksdag*, for example – or they may only take place once or twice a year to set general policy directions or elect leaders. In both cases, they tend to be closed to press and public scrutiny. Whether these committees become tools for determining party strategy and, whether they bind party members to their decisions varies considerably across parties and assemblies. Assembly parties also typically organize specialist policy committees – separate from an assembly’s legislative committees – develop party policy in particular areas and/or ensure representation of particular party interests.

## Types and Sources of Party Influence in the Assembly

Since most assembly members find that the benefits of a party label are greater than the costs, and parties play such an important part in organizing most national assemblies, how does party influence operate within assembly operations and decisions? Specifically, what is the relationship between chamber party leaders and those within the assembly who delegate power and influence to them? Do party leaders dominate even dictate policy to their assembly colleagues? Alternatively, is the flow of influence within assembly parties more a bottom-up process?

These questions have generated considerable debate and controversy among political scientists and continue to do so. Given the many different ways in which party might influence an assembly chamber’s proceedings and decisions – directly or indirectly –this is hardly surprising.

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At the outset, the simple facts of group membership and members' emotional attachment to their party might be expected to generate a minimum level of party support: assembly candidates for office and assembly members opt for one party rather than another, as indeed do their supporters outside the assembly. Copartisans associate with one another more than they do with party nonmembers inside the assembly, and want to meet one another's expectations. It is this minimal attachment to their party that assembly party leaders seek to tap when they appeal to party colleagues for support. If it did not exist, then, why would any assembly member join one party rather than another and why would a party leader bother to ask an individual party member for his/her support, and expect to receive it?

Assembly members and leaders, however, want their party to win elections, enact good public policy, deliver benefits to their electoral supporters, and acquire positions of power for themselves. For assembly parties to achieve these goals they need to be steered and leaders need to exert influence. Such efforts to influence need not necessarily amount to party whips pinning recalcitrant members to the wall or twisting arms just before or during a plenary vote. Rather, based on previous experience and intelligence-gathering within the assembly party through their whip organizations, leaders gauge levels of party support for their initiatives and use their personal skills to persuade colleagues to support the party.

Perhaps, more important, however, leaders – particularly majority party/coalition leaders – have important ways of exerting indirect influence to further their party's electoral and policy goals, including determining the form and content of legislation that is considered by the assembly.

### *Party Leadership Agenda-Setting and Structuring Chamber Choices*

Whether as ministers in the executive or as majority party leaders within separated or presidential systems, national assembly party leaders perform the important tasks of translating their party's election promises and their responses to new political issues demanding attention into a legislative agenda. Steering a national assembly in a particular policy direction is not only about emphasizing, focusing attention upon, and seeking to build legislative pressure on a problem, issue, or policy proposal – *creating a legislative agenda* – and *persuading* members to support a particular set of legislative proposal collectively agreed by the majority party or coalition. It is also about *manipulating the assembly chamber's procedures and decision processes* to the party's advantage by structuring chamber members' decision choices, privileging certain policy proposals at the expense of others, and shaping legislative outcomes. All three sets of agenda-setting activi-

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ties – creating an agenda, persuasion and manipulating the agenda – are important and are used by party leaders in concert. Applied to chamber procedures, they involve *controlling the legislative calendar and the overall timing of the legislative process*, and *structuring chamber choices through the amendment process*.

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Not surprisingly, in Westminster-type parliamentary systems – which account for something like 40 per cent of the total number of people who live in democratic systems – ministers in the majority party dominate assembly chamber agenda setting. In Britain, the daily calendar of assembly business is organized through the “usual channels” – informal negotiations primarily between the whips of the two main parties – but provisions of the House of Commons’ Standing Order 14, adopted in 1902 in response to obstructionist tactics employed by Irish nationalists demanding home rule, mean that except in certain circumstances “government business shall have precedence at every sitting”. Opposition and/or private members’ proposals are limited to specific days. The primary effects are to concentrate further agenda setting power within the executive (majority party leaders) and institutionalize party government even though some chambers – the Australian and New Zealand House of Representatives, for example – have cross-party business committees for deciding the daily order of business. The Australian business committee, like the one recently created in the British House of Commons, has only a limited role, with a remit to allocate non-government business. In each case, backbench representation is limited or nonexistent, and smaller parties and independent MPs may be excluded.

France’s semi-presidential system similarly privileges Government’s business in the *Assemblée Nationale* whereas the Rules Committee, which since the 1970s has been tightly controlled by the chamber’s majority party leadership, determines the floor agenda in the US House of Representatives. In almost all Latin American assemblies, the majority party leadership (if a majority exists) controls the assembly chamber’s plenary agenda through either a steering committee or the chamber directorate. Although individual members have the right to challenge the day’s agenda or to schedule a bill in committee by a simple majority vote in each of these chambers, this rarely happens. In the unicameral Panamanian *Asamblea Nacional* and Costa Rican *Asamblea Legislativa*, and Bolivia’s *Cámara de Senadores*, for example, a two-thirds majority vote is required to change the order of the day whereas in both chambers of the Mexican assembly and Nicaragua unicameral chamber, members need to petition the leader-

Assembly parties and leaders not only set the different chambers orders of business, they also *shape legislation* by controlling the timing of different stages of the legislative process within their chamber and the extent to which a bill will be subject to amendment.

ship committees for changes to the established timetable. In almost all Latin American systems, as well as in many parliamentary systems, it is chamber party leaders who act as the principal advocates for legislation sponsored by party members, substantially influence how a bill is handled in committee, and decide which legislation sponsored by which members reaches the plenary floor and who participates in the plenary debate. In certain circumstances, however, presidents enjoy exclusive rights to initiate certain policies, mainly to do with financial legislation and international agreements, and may compel assembly votes

Still, in many parliamentary and several presidential and separated systems, control over the daily order of chamber business is not the exclusive preserve of the majority party/coalition or the executive. In the German *Bundestag*, the executive plays only a very limited role. Assembly parties reach compromises in the *Ältestenrat* (Council of Elders), which are usually either acceptable to all parties or minority parties consider that attempts to change the agenda will most likely fail. Within the Italian *Camera dei Deputati*, opposition and governing parties share control over the daily order of business, thereby allowing the opposition to block Government proposals. Rules of the Dutch *Tweede Kamer* also permit the inclusion of bills on the daily calendar sponsored by individual assembly members, not just those promoted by the majority coalition. In Costa Rica too, all assembly party leaders have the right to include bills on the daily calendar on a proportional basis whereas in New Zealand unicameral House of Representatives there is a formal requirement that the business committee's decisions are unanimous or near unanimous, thereby according minority parties some influence. Other assemblies require supermajorities to consult over, negotiate, and approve the daily calendar of bills and the chamber's legislative agenda, although – as in the case of the US Senate, which requires unanimous consent for debate to proceed and a supermajority requirement to end debate – the leader of the majority party has the right to be recognized first. Still others – particularly in Latin America – provide for the chamber president or directorate to set the order of business on a consensual basis or jointly with party leaders.

Assembly parties and leaders not only set the different chambers orders of business, they also *shape legislation* by controlling the timing of different stages of the legislative process within their chamber and the extent to which a bill will be subject to amendment. Again, the extent to which parties and leaders do this varies considerably across different assembly chambers. In separated and presidential systems, the individual chamber itself controls the process, usually the chamber's majority (party) regardless of who controls the executive; thus, for example, the widely differing legislative processes within the majoritarian US House of Representatives and the non-majoritarian Senate. As in most Latin American presidential systems, the president must ask party allies in the assembly to introduce

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the bill on his/her behalf. In Australia and Britain, the majority party or coalition that controls the executive usually exercises control so that the substance of legislation is determined in the plenary. Under such conditions – which exist in the Australian and British House of Commons, for example – the committee stage is usually brief and supplemental and consists largely of executing decisions made in the plenary. In the German *Bundestag*, however, coalition party leaders in the executive branch have almost no institutional prerogatives for controlling the content of bills or the conduct or timetable of parliamentary business because assembly rules accord minority parties various opportunities to influence the content and timing of legislation. As a result, agenda setting is inclusive and consensual, assembly participation extends beyond the narrow range of governing parties and is rarely subject to filibusters and the relationship between the executive and the national assembly is relatively balanced. Even further away from the pole occupied by the Westminster-type systems are the decentralized legislative procedures in the Italian system, which grant full legislative powers to assembly committees to consider bills first and to approve them without recourse to the full plenary. Committees also play important agenda-setting roles in the US Congress, although not as much as they did in the mid-decades of the twentieth century, as well as in the German *Bundestag*, where committees may rewrite government bills, and initiate and kill legislation (albeit usually opposition or private members' bills), by not reporting them to the plenary.

Finally, the extent to which the party leaders may structure legislative choices and ultimately shape chamber legislation through the amendment process varies across systems. Clearly, if the assembly chamber's amendment process is open and does not require amendments to be germane constrains a majority party/coalition's power to initiate legislation. When, however, the executive's powers of initiation and control over amendments are combined and written into a chamber's standing orders, and reinforced by strong party cohesion – as in Westminster-type systems, the French *Assemblée Nationale*, and the Greek parliament – the concentration of agenda-setting power in the hands of the majority party or coalition is formidable. Indeed, the Greek parliament's standing orders go so far as to give ministers absolute authority to accept or reject any amendment offered in the plenary.

Other draconian agenda-setting devices available to majority party/coalition leaders in parliamentary systems and embedded in chamber standing orders include simply withdrawing legislation at any time, the effect of which is to maintain the status quo, using the “guillotine” to cut off debate and consideration of further amendments (as in the British and French assemblies), invoke “emergency” procedures that limit members' ability to revise legislation, and “last-offer” authority that gives government ministers/majority party leaders the right to offer the final amend-

Assembly members in separated systems tend to enjoy greater autonomy in determining legislative agendas than in presidential or parliamentary systems. In most presidential systems in Latin America, however, executives not only enjoy the veto power but at the post-enactment stage may also make “amendatory observations” on a bill they have vetoed.

ments to a bill, which sometimes have the effect of trumping previous amendments. The Danish *Folketing*, the French *Assemblée Nationale*, Italy’s *Camera dei Deputati*, the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, and the Swedish *Riksdag* all give government ministers this authority, which is especially useful to minority governments when they seek to eliminate or reduce the effects of opposition party amendments. So, for example, although the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*’s standing orders do not allow ministers to limit chamber debate or amendments offered, or impose time limits – and thus provide for an apparently open process, (coalition) ministers enjoy the right to sponsor “final offer” amendments. While not embedded in standing orders, majority party leaders in the US House of Representatives also enjoy similar “gagging” powers that limit the minority party’s ability to influence the content of legislation and may prohibit all floor amendments or simply deem legislation written exclusively by majority leaders as passed.

In practice, chamber’s majority parties/exercise varying degrees of agenda setting control. At one end of a spectrum are chambers in which agenda-setting power is highly centralized and concentrated in the hands of the majority party/coalition, which in the case of parliamentary systems, means the Government: most of the chamber’s time is devoted to the majority party/coalition’s proposals, with limited and specified time available for the minority party and/or individual members’ bills, assembly debate and amendments limited by standing orders, restrictive and/or germaneness rules, and committee consideration secondary, time-constrained, and restricted to implementing plenary decisions. At the other end are chambers in which agenda-setting is consensual – or agreed by a supermajority – or even by unanimous consent, where few if any restrictions are imposed on who can offer amendments or their content, and assembly committee play significant roles in shaping legislation before a bill reaches the plenary, with few if any restrictions on their capacity to alter the substance of a bill or any requirement that the original (government) bill with any revised (committee) version. Most chambers fall somewhere in between. Although there are exceptions, assembly members in separated systems tend to enjoy greater autonomy in determining legislative agendas than in presidential or parliamentary systems. In most presidential systems in Latin America, however, executives not only enjoy the veto power but at the post-enactment stage may also make “amendatory observations” on a bill they have vetoed. Sometimes, these new amendments are automatically enacted unless a qualified majority votes to reject them.

Although chamber party leaders enjoy important powers to shape legislative proposals and structure legislative choices, these powers – and thus party influence – would amount to little without the proclivities of indi-

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vidual assembly members to cohere with their chamber party colleagues and the effectiveness of party leaders' efforts to persuade them to support their party.

### *Party Cohesion and Discipline*

A familiar story is told about a member of the British House of Commons who on her way to the division lobby asks a party colleague what the subject of the division (vote) is. "Does it matter?" was the response; the implication being that the MP was expected to support her party regardless of the issues involved in the vote. The same story might be told of the Australian House of Representatives or Senate where the "party room" dominates, and many other national assemblies. Under constitutional conditions pervasive in Europe and other parts of the world (except the US and Latin America), in contrast with separated and presidential systems, the absence of majority party/coalition cohesion or discipline may make or break governments. In many systems, the most important role for majority party/coalition members of the national assembly is to sustain the Government. The executive gains and retains office so long as it maintains the confidence of the majority (party/coalition) in the assembly, if necessary, affirmed by a parliamentary vote of confidence. The survival and stability of the Government depends ultimately upon the governing parties remaining cohesive. Indeed, it is partly for this reason that party leaders in the Dutch *Tweede Kamer*, the French *Assemblée Nationale* (under the Fourth Republic), the German *Bundestag*, the New Zealand House of Representatives, the Spanish *Congreso de los Diputados*, and other parliamentary chambers, for example, actually cast votes for the *entire* membership of the parliamentary party, and only the positions of parties – not those of individual members – are recorded; although in some cases (for example, the New Zealand House of Representatives), individual MPs may cast votes against their party once the "party votes" have been taken.

Still, not all parliamentary parties display strong cohesion, notably those of Estonia, France (1945-1968), India, Israel, Italy, and Japan. Among separated and presidential systems, lower levels of cohesion are more common, for example, in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Uruguay and the US, but here too, there are outliers: chamber parties in Argentina, Chile, and Mexico, for example, display high levels of cohesion. Lower levels of cohesion may be randomized or structured/factional. Dissent is *randomized* when assembly members are motivated to vote against their party by particularistic and transient incentives, including constituency demands in respect of particular legislative measure.

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*Structured/factional* dissent is more formal, based on some shared permanent interests, including ideology, ethnic identity, regional, or loyalty to a particular leader, typically reinforced by faction control over rewards and sanctions that can be brought to bear on members, and tends to be associated with specific electoral rules. Party factions are particularly significant in Argentina, Italy, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Taiwan, the US, and Uruguay.

This essay has already outlined the benefits of parties to individual assembly members, and the importance of party cohesion, especially in parliamentary systems, but how important are coercion (by party leaders) and shared values and interests (non-coercion) in generating or facilitating cohesion?

Before answering those questions, not all political scientists accept the influence of party in national assemblies, particularly as a determinant of policy outcomes. Writing in the context of weak parties in the US Congress, political scientist Keith Krehbiel argues that what is perceived as partisan behavior is actually “preferenceship” influenced by the rules of the legislative game; effectively, Congress members vote their policy preferences without any significant “party effects”. That is, a Congress member’s party affiliation does not make his/her behavior *more* partisan than it would be otherwise without the existence of party structures, so that even when a majority party controls an assembly chamber, the numerical majority – rather than the majority party – will determine legislative outcomes. Leaving aside that even US scholars have not generally accepted Krehbiel’s analysis and interpretation, seeking to apply the analysis to parliamentary and other systems where party cohesion is extremely high would prompt a considerable degree of skepticism.

Political scientists tend to distinguish between party *cohesion* and party *discipline*, although they often use the terms synonymously. “Cohesion” refers simply to the extent to which members of an assembly chamber’s party act together, usually in respect of their voting behavior in the chamber, whereas “party discipline” refers to enforced cohesion. The basic questions remain, however: what direct factors sustain cohesion?

The earlier discussion showed how most candidates for assembly office and assembly members identify with a party brand, which is reinforced by association with co-partisans and socialization. In consequence, to the extent that an assembly party is cohesive, its members are likely to be *like-minded*. They will share emotional/psychological loyalties, moral commitments to their party, and policy preferences. Therefore, because they are likely to want to meet co-partisans’ expectations their default strategy will be to provide at least minimum support for their party. Rational cost-

Assembly party leaders have a variety of incentives (rewards as well as punishments) at their disposal to try to persuade party members to toe the party line. Their potency – and thus their use – varies considerably, however, across national assemblies.

benefit calculations may reinforce such partisan proclivities. It is not surprising, then, to find that many studies show that even when members of assembly chambers are permitted “free” votes (i.e. not whipped), they nevertheless tend to divide along partisan lines. Shared policy preferences may result in partisan behavior without coercion/enforced discipline. Conversely, even when members of the same assembly party hold different policy preferences, they will nevertheless unite to support their party leaders on *procedural votes* in order to reaffirm collectively the authority of their party – rather than the opposition party or coalition – to set and manipulate the chamber’s agenda, structure policy choices to their party’s advantage, and ensure that chamber policy outcomes reflect their preferences. Votes of confidence in parliamentary assemblies are, of course, intended precisely to test the assembly’s willingness to maintain support for the Government. By formalizing a distinction between the Government and the Opposition or between the majority and the minority, the Opposition/minority is encouraged to adopt opposition-for-opposition’s-sake strategies, which in turn induces government-versus-opposition/majority-versus-minority voting; ergo, highly cohesive party voting.

Still, chamber party leaders cannot take their co-partisans’ support for granted. When the fate of the Government is at stake in parliamentary systems or on legislative issues that are most important to the majority party or coalition in separated or presidential systems, leaders must be pro-active in building winning coalitions. Most leaders should expect to enjoy a head start because most colleagues will usually have voted for them when they originally won their leadership positions. They will also exploit party members’ dispositions to support their party, draw on reservoirs of members’ goodwill, and in certain situations use personal persuasion. High public support for an assembly leader or a president should also be an advantage. In consequence, the emphases placed by popular commentators on party leaders’ twisting arms and other forms of coercion, and references to assembly party leaders’ “iron grip” on their parties is misplaced. For, party discipline in the sense of leaders using sanctions and coercion only applies when non-coercive efforts fail. Moreover, such coercive efforts may also fail to achieve the intended results.

Nonetheless, assembly party leaders have a variety of *incentives* (rewards as well as punishments) at their disposal to try to persuade party members to toe the party line. Their potency – and thus their use – varies considerably, however, across national assemblies. Undoubtedly, the most potent reward is promotion to the party leadership, which in parliamentary systems means the cabinet. However, loyalty to the party is not the only criterion for promotion; disloyalty may achieve the same ends, as party leaders may be concerned to keep dissidents “inside the tent” rather than outside. Other rewards available to chamber party leaders include assign-

The maturity of a democratic political system influences the fluidity and stability of its party system, and thus how strongly party structures behavior in the national assembly. Assembly members need time and resources to identify common interests, decide on what issues they can act collectively, and build party and other organizations.

ments to particular legislative or party committees or task forces, particularly when the unit's policy jurisdiction coincides with an individual members' policy or constituency interests. Being appointed chair of a committee, task force, or for a minor party position or foreign travel delegation, or receiving visible leadership support at election time may also provide powerful incentives. Concomitantly, threats include the prospects of losing a committee assignment or chair, refusal to assign a member to a particular policy unit, and, most seriously, losing the party's nomination at the next election or being assign a low position on the party's list.

Undoubtedly, party leaders do apply rewards and punishments, and sometimes do so effectively; but, of themselves, they hardly provide an adequate explanation of party influence in a democratic assembly. How effectively party leaders promote their party's policy priorities, how they use their agenda manipulation powers to maximize intra-party cohesion in support of collectively agreed proposals, how successful they are in retaining their colleagues' confidence in their leadership, how they reward party loyalty, how effective they are in winning collective benefits for their party, how successful they are in persuading their assembly colleagues and in making policy concessions/side payments to party dissidents while maintaining party unity will generally be more important than arm-twisting and coercive tactics. If cohesion is very high, sanctions become unnecessary; if it is very low, they become unenforceable. Moreover, even when strong disciplinary powers are available to assembly leaders, the extent to which they use them effectively will depend on the specific policy issue as well as other situational factors.

Regardless of the availability and effectiveness of strong disciplinary powers to assembly chamber leaders, levels of party cohesion vary across national assemblies. All political systems are different, as are assembly members' parties and the specific political context with which they interact at any given time. To what extent do these differences explain different levels of party cohesion across national assemblies?

### *Explaining Levels of Party Cohesion Across National Assemblies*

Clearly, the maturity of a democratic political system influences the fluidity and stability of its party system, and thus how strongly party structures behavior in the national assembly. Assembly members need time and resources to identify common interests, decide on what issues they can act collectively, and build party and other organizations. In post-communist Russia, for example, there was no pre-existing organized opposition movement or party system and no negotiated transition where organized

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opposition forces bargained with leaders of the previous regimes over the creation of new democratic institutions, as there was in some countries of Eastern Europe. Following the emergence of more processes in Russia, basic institutional arrangements remained unsettled, particularly *Duma*-presidential relations, and Russian voters exhibited considerable fluidity and instability in their partisan and policy preferences. Yet, system immaturity alone cannot explain low party cohesion or party fluidity in assemblies. For, scholars have found important variations in party cohesion levels not only across new systems in transition – in Latin America and Eastern Europe, for example – but also in mature systems in transition (e.g. Italy and the US).

It might be thought that different constitutional and institutional configurations, rules and organizations might provide fertile grounds for explaining varying party cohesion levels. Where electoral institutions require assembly members of the same party to compete with one another for preference votes, where electoral rules do not provide for vote pooling within party lists, where party leaders exert weak control over nominations, and where assembly constituencies have large numbers of electors, assembly members tend to pursue individualistic electoral and legislative strategies that distance them from their national parties. Still, while revealing that different electoral rules have significant and pervasive effects, systematic analyses does not yield a neat fit with diverse levels of assembly party cohesion. Some open list PR systems, for example, are associated with assembly parties that are as cohesive as those found in the British and Canadian single-member and closed list multi-member systems.

Similarly, neither the structure of executive-legislative relations nor federalism yield strong correlations with cohesion levels although the logic of parliamentary government might suggest the necessity of cohesive governing parties and that of separated systems might be thought to discourages cohesion. As the previous discussion has repeatedly emphasized, parliamentary systems vary greatly in how they operate. Thus, intra-party cohesion levels are much more significant in Britain than in Italy or South Korea. Equally, where presidents exert strong influence, as in Argentina and Mexico, cohesion is also very high. Similarly, although federalism is often thought to weaken party cohesion as cross-cutting inter-regional and interstate conflicts are projected into the assembly making it more difficult for national party leaders' to construct broad partisan coalitions (as in Brazil and the US), a quick review of different systems shows that cohesion is very strong in Argentina, Australia, Canada, Germany or Mexico (all federal systems) but is weak in some unitary systems (e.g. Colombia, Ecuador, Israel and Japan).

The difficulties political scientists have encountered in finding strong correlations with levels of assembly party cohesion underline how the effects of institutional structures are mitigated by a complex array of other political institutions, actors and incentives that also influence members and their assembly parties, including assembly voting rules, and other forms of assembly organization .

The difficulties political scientists have encountered in finding strong correlations with levels of assembly party cohesion underline how the effects of institutional structures are mitigated by a complex array of other political institutions, actors and incentives that also influence members and their assembly parties, including assembly voting rules (for example, electronic voting, which enhances the visibility and availability of members' assembly votes), and other forms of assembly organization (including decision-making authority enjoyed by committees). Here again, multiple interactive causal effects should be expected. Yet, focusing on different systems' institutional features also cannot be sufficient. For, attention must also focus on significant socio-economic and political cultural factors. For example, it might reasonably be surmised, for example, generally more willing to trust their assembly party than in other more individualistic cultures.

For these and other reasons, some political scientists seek to explain cross-assembly cohesion levels by focusing instead on a cluster of variables that indicate the extent to which different political actors exercise *veto power* over decision-making processes and policy choices, and how party leaders seek to encourage intra-party cohesion through policy appeals, chamber decision rules, agenda-setting, and the dispensing of resources, including patronage, pork barrel, and campaign funds, that are highly valued by assembly members in pursuing their individual political goals. Even so, while systemic factors are undoubtedly useful in explaining variations across systems, they are clearly inadequate of themselves in explaining variations within systems, which may be as great as that across different systems. Some studies have found, for example, that left wing parties are usually more cohesive than others; but other scholars have found greater unity in right wing or centrist parties. Given the obvious benefits of majority party control, it might be anticipated that intra-party cohesion would be greater within the governing party or coalition than within opposition parties/coalitions – augmented in parliamentary assemblies by a significant “payroll vote” (government ministers subject to the additional and more powerful norms of collective responsibility). However, in some systems electoral rules and/or presidential influence, for example, might effectively trump these imperatives. Moreover, even in assembly chambers where majority parties/coalitions typically display high cohesion, unity may shatter on specific votes or when the same party repeatedly wins control of a chamber. Logic might also suggest that a majority party/coalition with only a small plurality of seats in the assembly chamber might provide incentives for higher cohesion as leaders keep contentious issues off the chamber's agenda and only bring forward those proposals that enjoy majority support within the governing party or coalition, whereas a large plurality elicits diminishing marginal returns, as the range of values and interests in the party that leaders need to satisfy widens and the scope for defections increases. In practice,

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however, as the earlier discussion noted, chamber party leaders might be equally effective in successfully manipulating legislative agendas, structuring decisions, shaping legislation and enforcing party discipline under both small and large majorities. Single chamber studies suggest that party members are more likely to be more cohesive on high-salience issues and when assembly votes occur near to elections, but no comparative results are available.

## Evaluating Political Parties in National Assemblies

Analyzing democratic national assemblies is not only impossible without discussing political parties, but also incomprehensible without recognizing parties as the most significant organizations within them. Parties may be in decline as institutions mediating between society and government but not as organizing forces within government.

Those seeking and those who become members of national assemblies do so to achieve certain political and personal goals. National assembly parties offer them ways and means of realizing those goals while reducing transaction costs, although the benefits are not entirely cost free; yet, for most assembly representatives, the benefits outweigh the costs of surrendering individual discretion. Otherwise, parties would not be so significant either in institutionalizing individual members into the chamber's internal processes or in establishing practices, procedures and conventions within the national assembly. As formally organized entities of public office-holders in caucuses, groups, or blocs, assembly parties provide collective as well as personal benefits. Assembly parties not only represent different and significant bodies of public opinion, by organizing assemblies and resolving collective action problems, they provide the vehicles in most assemblies by which laws are made, executives are to varying degrees held to account, relations between chambers are conducted in bicameral assemblies – and in parliamentary systems, they form the government.

Despite their ubiquity and significance in national assemblies, however, the extent to which parties perform these functions differs across time and space. That is, the extent to which members join the assembly beholden to a party, the extent to which assembly parties organize the chamber, the extent to which assembly members feel beholden to their party inside the assembly, the extent to which assembly members delegate power to party leaders, and the extent to which party leaders coordinate and steer chamber action and exert influence over party members varies widely. Where assembly parties are weak, fewer members have established party labels, more

change their partisan affiliations within an electoral term, party loyalty does not constrain chamber voting on legislative issues, and the set of parties represented in the chamber changes over time. Where they are strong, we find the opposites. In short, neither party organization nor party strength is uniform across national assemblies, and most variation exists between rather than within countries.

Finally, explanations for these across-countries variations cannot be confined to simplistic differences between parliamentary and supposedly presidential systems, or between different sets of election rules. Every national assembly has a unique set of formal and informal election rules and internal rules and procedures, is located within a particular constitutional and cultural context, and subject to influences emanating from different kinds of policies. Social scientists call this a classic degree of freedom problem that heavily circumscribes their attempts at systematic cross-national comparison. A multiplicity of short- and long-term social, economic, cultural, as well as institutional and party-specific factors influence the extent and how parties are organized. For the same reasons, assembly party development has not followed a continuous, unilinear course, nor will it in the future. It follows, therefore, that there is no one model of assembly party organization or party development. Nor should we expect to see one evolutionary trajectory of national assembly parties in widely varying social, political, technological and cultural contexts.

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