# Modern Legislatures

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# 5 Roles as strategies

## Towards a logic of legislative behavior

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### Introduction

In any large-scale community, roles help make social life bearable. Roles are regularized patterns of behavior that individuals display in different social circumstances, most typically in common and repeated activities on which others depend. Roles simplify our lives and reduce our uncertainty about effective and appropriate behavior. They similarly help others develop plausible expectations about the ways in which we are likely to behave. And for these reasons, they may reduce social uncertainty, transaction costs, embarrassment, and conflict. Roles exist in politics as they do in innumerable other aspects of social life.

Roles are important to those that engage in them (the subjects) as well as to those who observe and interact with these role-players (their audiences). While subjects and audiences may often perceive particular roles in similar ways, there is no guarantee that they will always and invariably do so. Generally, subjects perceive more nuances in the roles they play than are visible to their audiences, and they may also typically see themselves as having more discretion or individuality in their behavior. So, for example, legislators may see many different roles acted out by their peers in politics, whereas ordinary citizens are more likely to see all politicians as playing the same game.

Political roles are an obvious and venerable topic of scholarly research in political science. The scholarly analysis of political roles has examined both their subjective side, focusing on how roles are understood by those who play them, and their objective side, emphasizing how the same roles are perceived by their audiences. One of the recurrent debates in either of these literatures has to do with the extent to which political roles, as played and observed, are generated and driven by the values and perceptions of their subjects, by the constraints imposed by social institutions, or by needs and efficiencies ultimately grounded in different social functions. Thus, there is a psychological, an institutional, and a functional side to role analysis.

In representative democracies, what elected politicians do is what the voters have to live with. Therefore, the study of elite behavior has a venerable tradition in political science. Much of this scholarship has examined the regular patterns of behavior of members of parliament, since they are at the same time sufficiently

powerful to be interesting and sufficiently numerous to permit sensible generalizations. The object of such studies has been defined in terms of the roles of parliamentarians. "The noun role," Donald Searing (1994: 1) claims in his magisterial study of Westminster's World, "is a word that we cannot do without." And yet the scholarly focus on legislative roles, Searing observes, has for some time been in decline. "Articles continue to be produced on the topic, but they aren't much discussed. There aren't any major research projects under way on political roles. Nor are there signs of significant innovation in theory and method."

In his analysis of British parliamentarians, Searing defines roles as "particular patterns of interrelated goals, attitudes, and behaviors that are characteristic of people in particular positions." Searing distinguishes between position roles and preferences roles, between roles driven primarily by rules and reasons, respectively. In identifying the latter roles in particular, he relies on a wealth of interviews with British politicians. Searing's paradox, and the scope, ambition, and innovative character of his work make it a natural starting point for a discussion of the roles of parliamentarians not just in Britain, but in representative democracies in general. The purpose of this chapter is to suggest that position and preference roles can all be nested within a common framework. Building on a number of Searing's insights, I suggest that parliamentary roles in general can be fruitfully understood within a neo-institutional rational choice framework. Indeed, this research tradition is perfectly conducive to a marriage of "rules" and "reasons," and its parsimony and deductive rigor make it the most plausible vehicle for such a theoretical project. In brief, institutions are the "rules" than constrain "reason," but such constraints can be more or less binding. Position roles (fully institutionally determined strategies) and preference roles (institutionally unconstrained strategies) are the polar points on a continuum of constraint. Most real-world legislative roles lie somewhere in-between these extremes.

What, then, are legislative, or parliamentary, roles? How do they shape political behavior? In what ways are parliamentary roles themselves a function of the institutional rules that govern parliamentary life? To what extent can a simple conception of legislators' goals and parliamentary institutions help us understand and predict differences in legislative behavior across parliamentary democracies? These are the questions to which this chapter is devoted. In addressing them, I shall draw on evidence primarily from European parliamentary democracies, but also from the United States Congress and other legislative settings. My discussion builds on a previous article published in the *Journal of Legislative Studies* (Strøm 1997). For present purposes, however, I have revised some of my analytical claims, updated the discussion, and recast those parts of my argument that applied most specifically to the scholarly debate of the 1990s.

## Parliamentary roles as strategies

The study of legislative roles in parliamentary democracies has proceeded from a number of different perspectives. The scholarly literature thus variously



associates roles with tasks, functions, behaviors, or motivations. Role-governed behavior is in turn described in positive or normative ways. Searing thus distinguishes between structural, interactional, and motivational approaches. The first of these focuses on norms related to institutional functions, the second on individual negotiation and learning in specific settings, and the third on the purposes, goals, and incentives of politicians. Searing favors the third of these, the motivational approach, in large part because it seeks to capture the conceptions parliamentarians have of their own activities. In other words, it privileges the subjective aspect of political roles.

The motivational approach thus sets great store by the relationship between the behaviors that define roles and the motivations that underlie them. In fact, Searing defines these motivations, or preferences, as part of the roles themselves. I agree with Searing that in order to understand the roles of parliamentarians, we must pay attention to their preferences. However, I wish to draw a distinction between preferences and roles. Roles are routines, regular patterns of behavior. Although such routines may be shaped by cultural expectations, they are most likely to flow from reasoned and deliberate pursuits in which parliamentarians engage. Legislative roles can thus be viewed as behavioral strategies driven by the goals of politicians, yet roles are not identical with preferences or fully determined by them. Instead they are conditioned also by the institutional settings in which parliamentarians operate. The institutional features that matter most are those of the legislature itself, but also those of their national and local parties, as well as the electoral process. Parliamentary roles, therefore, are routinized strategies, driven by reasons (preferences), and constrained by rules.

By invoking the concept of strategy, I suggest the parliamentary role analysis can fruitfully be conducted under the broad umbrella of the most rigorous and parsimonious of motivational approaches: the rational choice tradition. This approach distinguishes clearly between preferences and strategies. Preferences are the exogenously given "tastes" that actors such as parliamentarians have over the outcomes that affect their political fortunes, such as nominations, elections, appointments, and policy decisions. But while the goals of politicians surely influence the patterned behavior they display, these goals do not in themselves constitute such roles. Instead, it is more meaningful to think of roles as strategies, or game plans. Strategies are endogenous prescriptions as to how actors (here: parliamentarians) may most successfully and efficiently act to maximize the likelihood of whatever outcomes they favor. Thus conceived, strategies are akin to the common definition of roles: they take the form of consistently patterned political behavior. Yet, strategies only make sense when we understand the preferences that drive them, as well as the institutions or structures that shape them.

Strategies have to prescribe specific forms of behavior under the control of the actors in question. For parliamentarians, strategic choices typically have to do with their commitment of scarce resources such as their time, money, and other assets. Role differentiations characterize various ways in which parliamentarians can allocate such scarce resources. These different patterns of resource

allocation reflect differences in the efforts parliamentarians put into the pursuit of their various goals. Some members spend a lot of their time trying to get reselected by their parties, others engage mainly in activities designed to boost their general election prospects, and yet others put their efforts into work that is likely to earn them promotions within their parties or within parliament.

The strategies of parliamentarians are thus prescriptions, or game plans, that help these politicians choose how to employ their scarce resources. Legislative strategies are not directly observable, but instead we infer them from the patterned behavior that parliamentarians display. What sorts of behavior, then, can we use to identify different parliamentary strategies? I have suggested that parliamentarians' strategies prescribe their commitment of their most important scarce resources. But where can these resources be put to use, and for what purposes? To answer these questions, we need to think systematically about the scarce resources that parliamentarians have at their disposal and about how institutions affect their use.

Empirical role analysis has indeed often focused on legislators' use of their scarce and consequential political resources, such as their voting power, time, attention, media access, or money. The ultimate resource within the parliamentary arena is the representatives' voting power, which they can use to promote causes that favor their constituency, their party, some social group to which they have ties, or their personal vision of the common good. Parliamentarians can also influence the parliamentary decision making process in other ways, by sponsoring, amending, or filibustering bills, by participating in legislative investigations or audits, by asking questions of ministers, etc. All such activities take time, and some may also require policy expertise, which it is often costly to acquire. There are plenty of competing demands on a legislator's time and attention. One set of such competing demands emanates from his electoral constituency, in which there will often be virtually insatiable demands for attention to individual case work and district projects. Local or national interest groups will present yet another set of demands. Last, but certainly not least, the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary party leadership will expect the member's loyalty and diligent service in a variety of arenas, including perhaps campaign efforts for other candidates, service on committees or in offices that have little or negative electoral payoff, and the like. The choices that parliamentarians make between these competing demands on their resources constitute their political strategies.

These strategies will be driven by the legislators' goals but also conditioned by the institutions in which they operate. Institutions affect roles in part by defining the range of behaviors available to members of parliament. Institutions do so by enabling and constraining behavior, that is to say, by making such forms of behavior feasible and others infeasible, and by shaping the incentives that different legislators face. Parliamentary roles, I would suggest, can best be understood as consistent strategies induced by the members' pursuit of their political objectives, constrained by the institutional environment in which they operate. When a parliamentarian chooses to focus her energies on constituent casework, for example, we first seek to explain that behavior with reference to her goals and the constraints



that political institutions place on her behavior and opportunities. The critical challenge is therefore to identify the most important objectives of parliamentarians and then the institutions that most significantly impinge on the ability of these legislators to achieve their objectives. It is to these tasks that I now turn.

## Legislators' preferences

The motivations of legislators have been a focal point of a rapidly growing literature on legislative organization and behavior.[1] This literature has transformed scholarship on the United States Congress and contributed to a shift that Searing observes, from sociological role analysis to rational choice incentive-based explanations of legislative behavior. The single work most responsible for this revolution is David Mayhew's (1974) book *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. Although Mayhew did not formalize his argument or put it in game-theoretic terms, it profoundly influenced scholars in the rational choice tradition, which was only beginning to hit its stride in the 1970s. Mayhew argues that much can be understood about the behavior of United States Congressmen if one assumes that they are "single-minded seekers of reelection" (Mayhew 1974: 5). The pursuit of reelection, he argues, "underlies everything else, as indeed it should if we are to expect that the relations between politicians and public will be one of accountability" (Mayhew 1974: 16–17).

Mayhew's stark stylization proved both catchy and enormously influential. Nonetheless, other scholars have added to its characterization of politicians' objectives and abandoned some of its simplicity. Joseph Schlesinger (1991) added some nuance to the electoral motivation. Much in the vein of Mayhew, he argued that political ambition is the key to understanding candidate behavior and even to political parties as organizations. Political ambition, however, can take several different forms: discrete, static, and progressive. Discrete ambition is the desire for a particular office for a single term. Static ambition consists in the pursuit of the same office for multiple terms. Finally, progressive ambition is where an individual aspires to some office more powerful or important than the one that he or she now holds. This is where one political office becomes a stepping-stone for another and more desirable one.

Thus, Mayhew's archetypical congressman holds only one of three possible forms of political ambition, as Schlesinger portrays it, namely the static one. Politicians with discrete ambition do not fit Mayhew's description of the single-minded seeker of reelection. Nor do those with progressive ambition. But there may be good reasons why members of the US House of Representatives so commonly display static ambition. It may be because the next election is never far away and because for many of them, the risks of running for higher office (displaying progressive ambition) are prohibitive. The two-year terms of US representatives focus their attention admirably on the next election. Moreover, the two-year terms means that there is hardly ever a time when these representatives can run for higher office without at the same time vacating their House seats. Most parliaments, in contrast, are elected for terms of four or five years, rather

than the two-year term faced by member of the US House of Representatives. And in the Westminster system, there is no necessary conflict between running for reelection and progressive ambition.

Even as a characterization of American legislators, Mayhew's thesis has hardly gone uncontested. Among Mayhew's own contemporaries, Richard Fenno (1973, 1978) argued that members of Congress have multiple objectives, which may often conflict. Some of these goals, however, are more fundamental than others: reelection, influence within the House, and good public policy. Fenno adds to these external career considerations and private gain, which he treats peripherally or not at all. Gary Cox and Mathew McCubbins (1993) and John H. Aldrich (1995) expand on Fenno's second motivation in particular. But although they reject Mayhew's stylized claim that members of Congress are single-minded in their quest for reelection, Cox and McCubbins (1993: 109), for example, "do believe that it is an important component of their motivation."

Although all these works are studies of legislators in the American presidential systems, they hold important lessons for the study of parliamentary ambitions and roles as well. Building on these analyses, I argue that parliamentarians have four distinct types of goals related to their legislative service. The four parliamentary goals, or the components of the parliamentary utility function, are: (1) reselection (renomination), (2) reelection, (3) party office, and (4) legislative office. (In addition, legislators may of course have other goals that pertain to their lives outside of parliament, as Fenno suggests.) By party office, I mean such positions as party leader, whip, member of the parliamentary party leadership or steering committee, or front bench status – in other words such forms of privilege that are entirely under the control of the party itself. By legislative office, I mean positions to which a member must be elected by parliament as a whole, or by some cross-partisan subset of the legislature, such as speaker/president, committee chair, member of the parliamentary steering group, etc. In pure two-party systems, the distinction between party and legislative office may in practice be of no consequence, if the majority party controls access to all-important legislative offices. In multiparty parliamentary democracies, on the other hand, the allocation of legislative offices is typically at the hands of some coalition of parties.

Clearly, several of these objectives are mainly instrumental: they are means to an end. Thus, politicians wish to be nominated and elected because of the benefits that flow from holding office rather than because of the pure joy of winning or simply seeing their names in print. That is to say that legislative objectives are often hierarchically ordered. The attainment of one goal may be a precondition for any or all of the others. For example, in most legislatures, party renomination is critical to the attainment of any other goal. If you do not receive your party's nod for the ballot, you cannot be elected, and if not elected, you obviously cannot enjoy any of the benefits of parliamentary membership. Election is thus necessary for any further goal attainment in parliament. The iron-clad necessity of election in democratic legislatures (other than the odd assemblies such as the House of Lords) makes the "single-minded pursuit of reelection" the primary



instrumental goal of legislators. Typically, party office is also more or less of a prerequisite for legislative office, although the necessity here is less strict. Some members become legislative leaders (e.g. presiding officers) without achieving any high position in their respective parties.

There is a fairly clear hierarchy of legislator objectives. The first goal, which is typically critical to any further ambition, is to gain ballot access, most commonly by receiving one's party's nomination. Once nomination has been secured, election is the next concern. Both of these are critical to any further goal achievement. Once elected, parliamentarians may to some extent be able to choose between party and legislative career objectives. To the extent that these are interrelated, partisan office is more likely to be a precondition for advancement in legislative office, rather than vice versa. Yet, the hierarchy between the latter two objectives is less strict in some multiparty democracies than it is in the Westminster model.

Institutions help determine what discretion parliamentarians have in choosing their roles based on these objectives, as such rules may strictly constrain the viable ways in which parliamentarians can husband their scarce resources, or leave them with greater choice and discretion. The most important institutional constraints are in turn driven by the two masters that legislators serve: their voters and their parties, respectively. Parliamentarians serve as "common agents" of these two democratic "principals" (Strøm *et al.* 2003), and it is their accountability to these masters, and the latter's respective demands, that most decisively constrain these legislators' pursuit of their political goals.

The freedom with which parliamentarians may choose their legislative roles depends on the demands of these accountability relationships. The more tightly constrained parliamentarians are by the demands of their parties or voters, the less freedom they have to choose what Searing calls preference roles. And the tighter the constraints, the more we should expect to see parliamentary role playing determined by constitutional principles and party rules and statutes.

The political institutions that most powerfully enable and constrain parliamentarians are those that regulate their attainment of ballot access, reelection, party office, and legislative office. The first two of these objectives are conditioned in large part by the electoral system, which embodies the legislators' accountability to their constitutional principals, the voters. Yet, of course political parties also keenly seek to control the selection and election of parliamentary candidates. The third and fourth objectives are most directly governed by party rules and legislative procedure, which in turn in large part reflect the interests of the parliamentary parties. Let us now consider how the demands of voters and parties constrain the roles of politicians in the pursuit of each of their four goals.

## Candidate selection

Candidate selection (or nomination) is the first official step on the way to parliament, and the first hurdle that incumbent members have to face. There are typically a large number of regulations on the selection of legislative candidates by

the relevant political parties. Some such regulations are embedded in national legislation, although relatively few countries (including, however, the United States and Germany) go very far in regulating the candidate selection process through ordinary legislation. More commonly, regulations are imposed by the parties themselves, which means that they may differ between different parties in the same political system, or even between different electoral districts in the same party.

The candidate selection process may be more or less centralized. In some parties, such as the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan or the conservative parties in France, the national executive committee is a decisive player. More commonly, the process is decentralized to the individual constituencies. Some parties, especially those with a civil-libertarian bent, practice intraparty primary elections, but in far more parties local party officers and/or officials are effectively in charge. Under multi-tier electoral systems, different procedures may be in place at different tiers. Finally, some "corporative" parties allow selected interest groups (e.g. labor unions, farmers' groups, or women's groups) an institutionalized role in the candidate selection process.

The importance of the selection process varies with the electoral system. In single-member district systems, of course, candidate selection is typically critical to electoral success. It is true that in recent US Senate elections, two incumbents denied renomination by their respective parties (Democrat Joseph Lieberman in 2006 and Republican Lisa Murkowski in 2010) have nevertheless won reelection by running as the candidate of a minor party (Lieberman) or even through a write-in campaign (Murkowski). Yet, such stories remain the exception rather than the rule, as reselection by your party is close to a necessary condition for reelection. The same is by and large true in closed-list proportional representation (PR) systems, in which nomination at the top of a major party list can virtually guarantee election and thus remove practically all risk from the general election. Under open-list proportional representation, and under the single transferable or non-transferable vote, on the other hand, candidate selection is far less likely to guarantee success. Under these systems, parties nominate multiple candidates in each district, and the success of each candidate depends on the preferences of the ordinary voters. Thus, party nomination is typically necessary for electoral success, but often by no means sufficient. Moreover, in political systems that allow independents or write-in candidates easy access to the ballot, party reselection may not even be necessary even though it is virtually everywhere at least helpful.

Yet, reselection efforts may not be a very salient concern for the legislator to begin with. Strategies aimed at reselection only make sense when the party's endorsement is scarce or contested. Yet, in most systems and parties, the deck is stacked in favor of incumbents interested in reelection. This is true in general of British parties, where strategies focused on reselection rarely seem to dominate legislator behavior. Indeed, none of the many parliamentary roles described by Searing describes a parliamentarian whose main concern is reselection. In systems where ballot access is easy, we would expect a similar lack of concern.



Closed-list PR systems with competitive selection processes should tend to experience a great deal more partisan constraint on role identification. Here, selection is critical and the specific placement a candidate gets on the list is likely to be decisive. It is therefore interesting to see that in his comparative analysis of Nordic parliamentarians, Peter Esaiasson (2000: 59) reports that MPs in Sweden and Norway, the two Nordic countries whose electoral systems most approximate closed-list PR, are much more likely to define themselves as agents of their respective parties than their opposite numbers in Finland, which has a much more open form of candidate preference voting.

How is the pursuit of reselection likely to influence legislative strategies or roles? The motivation can find expression in a variety of behaviors, depending on the locus and rules of the candidate selection process. If the national executive committee were decisive, then we would expect behavior designed to please the central party leadership (such as legislative obedience and diligence). If the more common pattern of local control obtains, then reselection-minded legislators should aim to please their local constituents and specifically the often narrow set of party selectors more than the ordinary constituency voter. Local activists would tend to be the decisive constituency, and issue-oriented local efforts (rather than, for example, "random" casework for constituents) the most plausible key.

## Election

As noted in an earlier section, the electoral motivation forms the basis of the most famous and powerful explanations of the behavior of politicians. The fact that democratic societies fill most important political offices directly or indirectly through elections obviously supports such understandings of the political process. Getting elected is crucial, indeed strictly necessary, for members of almost all significant legislative chambers. Yet, there may be scenarios under which parliamentarians' behavior is not at all or not significantly constrained by the electoral connection. That is where (1) legislators cannot realistically aspire to be reelected, or (2) candidate selection is virtually tantamount to election. In the former case, reelection is impossible. In the latter, it is more or less assured once the member has been reselected. In neither case would we expect the reelection motive to dominate legislative behavior.

Both situations could occur for a number of reasons having to do with the electoral system. If legislators cannot hope to be reelected, it is most commonly because the constitution or other binding regulations prohibit their reelection. Although formal term limits are uncommon in parliamentary democracies, they do exist in many presidential regimes. In American state legislatures, rather strict term limits have become quite common. In a number of Latin American countries, they are even stricter. The Costa Rican and Mexican constitutions, for example, permit no reelection for any member of the national legislature. Where such restrictions apply, it is obviously senseless for members to worry about reelection (at least in the short term), and we expect their behavior to be driven

by all sorts of other considerations. Where reelection is restricted in parliamentary democracies, however, it is typically due to informal party rules rather than constitutional prohibitions.

The opposite situation is where politicians, once selected, have little or no reason to worry about the general election. This is most likely to be the case for high-ranking candidates of major parties in closed-list PR systems. In Norway, for example, the first-ranking candidates (or even number two or three) of either the Labor Party or the Conservatives in large districts like Oslo do not have to give a lot of attention to their personal reelection prospects. Naturally, these are list positions that party leaders such as prime ministerial candidates often occupy. For those who wish to escape electoral competition, the next best thing is to be the candidate of the favored party in uncompetitive single-member districts. Once selected, Democratic candidates for inner-city congressional districts in the United States typically have little to worry about in the general election. The same could be said for British Labour candidates in major industrial cities, as well as for Conservative candidates in the southeastern English countryside. As a consequence, such candidates should be free to devise legislative strategies not significantly constrained by their electoral accountability to the voters.

Most parliamentarians, however, are not so lucky. Competitive single-member districts and systems that permit intraparty preference voting are likely to exhibit particularly high levels of electoral constraint. In such systems, the fate of each legislator depends not only on the general support of his (or her) party (which he may be able to affect only marginally), but also on his own personal standing with the voters. The effects of the popularity of co-partisans vary widely between such systems. Under the single, non-transferable vote, long used in Japanese elections, members are in no way helped by votes for other candidates from their own party. In fact, if one's own vote is held constant, increased support for a fellow partisan is as likely to hurt as to help. Under the same conditions in a single transferable vote system (such as Ireland), on the other hand, increased support for co-partisans is more likely to help than hurt, as long as candidate preferences are positively constrained by party.

But electoral formula is not the only factor that determines the constraining power of elections on legislative strategies. Members' concern for reelection is also likely to show cyclical fluctuations, which may be dramatic. Legislators elected for long and fixed terms (such as US senators) can have the luxury of a respite from the pressures of campaigning in the first part of their terms. Similarly, members of legislatures where the power of parliamentary dissolution is restricted can at least feel a little more insulated than where a prime minister or president (perhaps from an unfriendly party) may freely choose to dissolve parliament at any time.

In their perennial (or nearly so) struggle for reelection, members develop a number of strategies designed to improve the popular standings of their parties and, in particular, themselves. The literature on political campaigns is replete with descriptions of the former and more general phenomenon. The latter topic has been examined mainly in the growing literature on the personal vote. In their analysis of personal voting in Britain and the United States, Cain, Ferejohn, and Fiorina (1987) distinguish between personal contacts, casework, project assistance, mail solicitations, and "surgeries." The more electorally constrained the member, and the more his or her fortunes depend on a personal vote, the more diligently we should expect that person's resource commitments to conform to these patterns. Searing identifies two types of "constituency members" among the backbenchers in the House of Commons: "welfare officers" and "local promoters." It is roles such as these that we should expect to see among members with particularly competitive electoral constituencies.



## Party office

Most members of parliaments have to give serious attention to their prospects for reselection and reelection. For many, or at least for good parts of the tenure of many, the pursuit of these objectives stretches their time and resources to their limits. Although most might in principle wish to rise above the ranks of backbenchers, few in practice have the opportunities to do so without jeopardizing their political survival. But although few are actually chosen, many may condition their parliamentary behavior on the aspiration to rise above the rank of backbencher, either through party or parliamentary office.

The degree to which such aspirations affect legislative strategies and thus roles depends upon opportunities as well as on constraints. And the institutions that in turn shape the opportunity structures are themselves in part parliamentary ones and in part those that pertain to other political offices, particularly those likely to be valued above a backbench position in parliament. Whereas candidate selection and election processes are not necessarily any different in parliamentary systems than in presidential ones, the incentive structure defined by the structure of party and legislative office opportunities clearly diverge from those of non-parliamentary regimes.

A defining characteristic of parliamentarism is that the cabinet "emerges from" parliament itself. In the classical Westminster tradition, this implies not only cabinet accountability to parliament, but also that cabinet members are drawn from the ranks of the legislature (and continue to serve there). In this sense, the cabinet is a true subset of the legislative branch of government, and the relationship between the two branches one of internal delegation. This constitutional arrangement has obvious incentive effects for parliamentarians with progressive ambition, as virtually all the objects of their desire may be under the control of their respective party leaders. In presidential regimes, progressive ambition is by definition incompatible with continued service in the same legislative body. In order to serve in higher political office, members have to look beyond the confines of their chamber and ultimately to give up their seats there. In parliamentary systems, on the other hand, higher (particularly cabinet) office is achieved through a career in parliament, and there is no sense in which politicians have to choose between two discrete career paths.

Party office, such as one's party parliamentary leader, deputy leader, whip, or a member of its parliamentary executive (steering) committee, is one of the two types of ambition that members of parliament might harbor beyond reelection. As mentioned above, we can at least analytically distinguish this kind of ambition from legislative office ambition, although in practice the same party leaders may control both sets of offices. Party office objectives are most likely to be associated with progressive ambition in Schlesinger's classical sense. Parliamentarians who aspire to party leadership positions in parliament are also likely to harbor explicit or implicit ambitions of becoming cabinet-level leaders within their respective parties. This is particularly likely in systems where cabinet members are either required or permitted to hold simultaneous membership in parliament, and where a large share of cabinet members are in fact recruited directly from parliament. The United Kingdom, Ireland, Belgium, and Italy are examples. Indeed, particularly in unitary Westminster systems, the cabinet is by far the most attractive avenue for upward political mobility.

Party office in parliament is normally filled by election among the party's members in parliament. Often, however, these selections are subject to formal or informal approval by the party leadership, particularly perhaps in governing parties. For cabinet office, of course, the approval of the party leadership is even more crucial and in fact usually decisive. Parliamentarians who aspire to party office therefore have two constituencies they have to please: their peers and the party leadership. Ways to please the party leadership include loyalty, diligence, versatility, and a willingness to take on arduous and unrewarding tasks for the good of the party. The same behaviors may in general also be good ways to build favors among one's fellow partisans, although unswerving loyalty to the party hierarchy may find more favor among the party's leaders than among the backbenchers, who might instead prefer mutual deference, mutual support in campaigns and committee work, or the like.

A successful aspirant to party office must therefore be willing to devote time and energy to party objectives, even if that means neglecting one's local constituency or supporting causes that have little local support. This strategy may or may not involve the acquisition of policy expertise, which can at least be useful for credit claiming purposes. A politician who has such ambitions and who can afford to take such risks vis-à-vis his or her constituency, is likely to fall into the category of backbenchers that Searing calls ministerial aspirants, or perhaps that of policy advocates. Clearly, this is a potentially treacherous pursuit for MPs whose constituency preferences differ sharply from those of the party leadership, or who for other reasons face stiff competition for reselection or reelection.

## Legislative office

Legislative office, which is the final source of the benefits that drive parliamentary behavior, refers to all those positions in parliament that are involved in the execution of important legislative responsibilities and which are predominantly non-partisan or cross-partisan in nature. Legislative organization is, according to



Krehbiel (1991: 2), "the allocation of resources and assignment of parliamentary rights to individual legislators or groups of legislators." In the great majority of modern legislatures, members are elected equal. All members, regardless of, say, the pluralities by which they gained election or the number of voters they represent, have the same parliamentary rights and privileges. With rare exceptions, voting rules in legislatures are egalitarian and "undifferentiated," and each legislator's vote counts as much as that of any other. One person, one vote. Yet, in reality there are all kinds of differences between members. Such differences take two general forms: hierarchy (vertical differentiation) and specialization (functional or horizontal differentiation).

These forms of differentiation define legislative organization. Parliamentary organization (the distribution of rights and powers assigned to parliamentarians individually and collectively) and procedures (decision-making rules within parliament) define a large part of the repertoire of member strategies. For example, parliamentary standing committees may or may not be an important arena for activities aimed at reelection or partisan advancement in parliament. Whether or not they do, will depend on the specific composition, powers, and procedures of the committees. For example, if committees engage in highly visible and publicized hearings or investigations, they may be important arenas in which reelection and perhaps reselection goals can be pursued. If, on the other hand, committees meet behind closed doors, but have substantial powers to initiate or amend bills, then they may be important arenas for the pursuit of party or legislative office, but less useful campaign fora. If neither of the above is true (as with standing committees in the British House of Commons), then committees are unlikely to be of much strategic importance for members seeking to please their parties or constituencies.

Legislative organization can be shaped wholly or in part by the interests of the political parties that control the assembly. In Westminster systems, there is little room in legislative organization for rules or procedures that are likely to hamper the dominant parties. In the US system, in contrast, there are more legislative procedures that sometimes stand in the way of party interests. Of course, most parliamentary offices are directly or indirectly filled through partisan selection processes. Yet the "inter-party mode" is not the only aspect of parliamentary politics. Building on King (1976), Andeweg and Nijzink (1995) identify both the "non-party mode" and the "cross-party mode" as important facets of legislative politics in European parliamentary democracies. These facets of parliamentary politics are reflected in such symbolic issues as seating arrangements, where in Norway and Sweden, members are seated by district, regardless of partisan affiliations. More importantly, specialized parliamentary committees sometimes constitute fora in which members may advance relatively independently of their fortunes within their own party hierarchies. Indeed, for some politicians, a parliamentary committee career may be a very attractive alternative to cabinet aspirations. Andeweg and Nijzink also point out the plethora of intra-parliamentary caucuses, such as for regional, gender, or language groups, that exists within many parliaments.

Even more importantly, internal affairs committees and boards of presiding officers sometimes offer opportunities for legislative office that may compete with more partisan career paths. According to Jenny and Müller's (1995) informative survey of presiding officers in European parliaments, such offices vary considerably both in partisanship and in power. Powerful and partisan presiding officers, such as the Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, are by no means the only or even the most common type of presiding officer. In fact, among the European countries surveyed by Jenny and Müller (1995), only Greece has a president who is both very powerful and highly partisan. In many other parliamentary democracies, MPs may become speaker (presiding officer) without having achieved any high position in their respective parties. This pattern is most typical of Westminster-style parliaments, but similar cases can be found in Belgium, Iceland, and Switzerland as well.

The institutions that most decisively affect members' pursuit of such legislative office are those that regulate the selection, powers, and accountabilities of presiding officers and other relevant internal officers of parliament. Since these rules are manifold and complex, it is difficult to generalize about their specific effects. Yet, I expect to see parliamentarians increase their efforts toward legislative office as (1) their reselection opportunities improve, (2) their reelection opportunities improve, (3) the attractiveness of legislative, as opposed to partisan, office increases, and (4) their opportunities for partisan office decrease. In other words, strategies aimed at legislative office should be particularly common among MPs with relatively secure seats and limited frontbench prospects, and in parliaments where legislative offices are comparatively desirable.

The strategies of those who seek legislative office are most akin to the roles Searing lumps into his category of "parliament men." Of all his backbench roles, this is the most diverse category, with the largest set of subtypes. The general role of parliament man is also a fair description of frontbencher Charles Seymour's ultimate career choice in Jeffrey Archer's (1984) novel *First Among Equals*. As Searing puts it, the parliament man is "a role that is neither widely recognized nor well defined." This is primarily because there are so few parliament men. To Searing, this scarcity "seems strange, for this role was common and indeed dominant during earlier eras."

But should this paucity be such a surprise? Applying the argument I have developed above, the incidence of parliament men should decline as reselection and reelection get more competitive, and as the attraction of legislative office declines relative to that of partisan office. Putting the issue in such comparatively static terms, we may in fact recognize a plausible description of the evolution of the British House of Commons over the past century and a half. What has happened is precisely that the conditions that favor parliament men (or, strategies aimed at the pursuit of legislative office) have become less and less prevalent. Indeed, today's British House of Commons, with its high levels of partisanship, is precisely one that we would expect not to be very conducive to legislative office pursuits.



## Conclusion

In order to understand representative democracy, we need to develop analytical tools by which we can make sense of the behavior of the elected representatives of the people. The concept of roles is one such tool that has been prominently employed in studies of legislative institutions. Role analysis promises to give us simple and applicable tools with which we could describe and explain legislative behavior. Yet, in contemporary political science role analysis has fallen somewhat out of favor. This is, I believe, at least in part because role analysis has not always been quite clear about what it can do or about its own limitations. The concept itself has seemed to subsume individual beliefs, common expectations, actual behaviors, and even institutional functions, without clear demarcations or causal stipulations between these different components.

In this chapter I have suggested that parliamentary role analysis can be cast as a study of the strategies of legislators for the commitment of scarce resources. These strategies are likely to be conditioned by the relative scarcity of various institutionally generated "goods" that parliamentarians seek. These goods include reselection, reelection, party office, and legislative office. Ultimately, then, the incidence of different parliamentary roles should bear a powerful and predictable relationship to the supply of such political benefits. Yet, their accountabilities to voters and to their respective parties often constrain the behavior of legislators sufficiently that it can drive what we observe as their role behaviors. For example, there are many institutional circumstances in which we would definitely not expect members of parliament to be single-minded in their pursuit of reelection.

Much of the diversity of parliamentary lives, I have argued, is subject to relatively simple explanation. We can gain important insights by portraying legislators as if they were purely instrumental in their pursuits of different benefits that legislative institutions afford them. To some, this argument may seem both cynical and restrictive. I do not want to argue that altruism and other non-self-interested motivations play no role in determining the behavior of parliamentarians. Clearly, my aim has been to simplify reality, and the motivations of legislators are more complex than what any simple scheme can capture. Yet, many legislators cannot afford to indulge their less self-interested motivations. Doing so might lead to a shorter and less gratifying political career than they might otherwise enjoy. And the powerful ways in which political institutions thus constrain the strategies of elected representatives may be one of the more general and comprehensible features of democratic politics.

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# 6 Legislators and their representational roles

## Strategic choices or habits of the heart?

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What are the sources of legislators' role orientations? The literature on this issue implies two very different answers to this question. Early role theorists perceive roles from a structural–functionalist perspective emphasizing particular sociostructural variables in explaining legislators' role orientations. More recent contributions on this issue envision roles as strategic behavior based on given interests and institutional constraints. This chapter contributes to the debate on the sources of legislators' role orientations in a twofold way. First, it contributes to our theoretical understanding in discussing both approaches to explaining legislators' roles from a micro-level perspective and in asking for particular causal mechanisms linking the contextual and behavioral levels of analysis. Second, it contributes to our empirical understanding of representational roles by testing both competing role theories for the German case drawing from the German Candidate Study 2005 (GCS).

### Legislators and the types of roles they play

The concept of legislative roles came of age in the 1950s and 1960s. Among others, it was conceived as an instrument to further our empirical understandings on the relationship between citizens and their representatives in systematic ways. Thus, role theory supplements prescriptive approaches to researching the puzzle of political representation on the one hand (e.g. Pitkin 1967) and purely descriptive ones on the other.

In particular, role theory focuses on the questions of whom MPs represent in their decision-making behavior (focus of representation), and in what way they aim to represent given constituencies (style of representation). The ideal typical distinction between the delegate and trustee roles provides an early and classical answer to these questions (Wahlke *et al.* 1962). According to this typology, in their representative functions, delegates primarily focus on their electoral constituencies and perceive themselves as mouthpieces of constituency demands. In contrast, while acting as representatives, trustees are considered to primarily focus on all citizens and their long-term interests.

Subsequent empirical research on the trustee and delegate conceptions of political representation resulted in one important modification in this regard.