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Parliamentary Committees in European Democracies

KAARE STRØM

Parliamentary committees are among the most important features of legislative organisation in contemporary democracies. This analysis identifies three perspectives on committees in the neo-institutional rational choice literature on legislative organisation, in which committees are viewed as vehicles for gains from trade, information acquisition and partisan co-ordination, respectively. Guided by these perspectives, the article then surveys the structure, procedures and powers of legislative committees in 18 western European democracies from 1990. The data are drawn from a cross-national collaborative research project directed by Herbert Döring (1995).

Parliamentary committees are widely recognised to be important arenas of legislative deliberation.¹ In his classic and oft-quoted study, Woodrow Wilson equated congressional government with committee government.² Wilson, of course, was referring to the political system he knew best, namely the federal institutions of the United States, and students of politics have long recognised that American-style presidential government enhances the power of legislatures and legislative committees. Yet, legislative committee power is by no means strictly a function of presidential government. As Laundry notes, '[a]ll Parliaments work to a greater or lesser extent through committees'.³ Though there are still some 'arena' parliaments in which committees may not be the focal point of parliamentary activities, committees are part and parcel of the way most legislatures do their work. In many, though not all, parliamentary systems, assembly committees are important fora for policy making. Therefore, no

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understanding of the world of parliamentarians can be complete without an account of the committees in which they serve.

The recognition of this fact is borne out by a substantial literature on legislative committees, which has had a number of scholarly foci and objectives. One set of questions has focused on the *structure* of such legislative sub-units. How are parliamentary committees organised and why do they take the form they do? A second line of inquiry has addressed the legislative *process* in which committees participate. Where and when do they come into play, and what are the causes and consequences of different legislative procedures? Finally, perhaps the greatest interest among legislative scholars has been in the *powers* of committees. To what extent do committees control the legislative agenda and thereby the output that the elected representatives of the people produce? Why are committees given such powers as they have? What consequences do powerful (or powerless) committees have?

This article examines the role of committees in European legislatures in view of all these concerns by exploring their structure, procedures and powers. The broader objective is to understand the role of parliamentary committees in the legislative process. Although in the process of addressing these issues parliamentary committees are discussed rather broadly, the focus throughout will be on committees with significant law-making tasks, rather than on those whose principal functions lie elsewhere. The analysis will emphasise the committees' legislative impact or, more specifically, the ways in which they foster or hinder legislative effectiveness.

The next section places the discussion within the literature on legislative organisation. The functions that parliamentary committees serve are then considered within that perspective. It is shown how the rapidly growing literature in this area has generated three distinct, though at least partly complementary, perspectives on legislative committees. From these theoretical perspectives, the discussion turns to a description of the structure of legislative committees in European parliaments. The next two sections then survey, respectively, these committees' procedures and powers. After laying out these features, some suggestions are made as to how one might examine the relationships between committee powers, structures and procedures.

COMMITTEES AND LEGISLATIVE ORGANISATION

A legislative committee is a sub-group of legislators, normally a group entrusted with specific organisational tasks. Like other legislative arenas, a legislative committee is designed to promote majority rule but also to protect minority rights.⁴ In this way, as in many others, committees are

microcosms of the larger assembly.⁵ Within their areas of responsibility, parliamentary committees are often vested with decision-making privileges. These privileges deserve some elaboration since they, in important ways, modify a very consistent decision-making principle in parliaments, namely the rule of 'one person, one vote'.

In the great majority of modern legislatures, members are elected equal. That is to say, all legislators, regardless of such background factors as the pluralities by which they gained election, have the same membership rights and privileges. With rare exceptions, voting rules in legislatures are egalitarian and 'undifferentiated', and each legislator's vote counts the same as that of any other. Such egalitarian principles, which are often constitutionally entrenched, commonly go far beyond the final act of voting. Fundamentally, legislatures are *collegial*, rather than hierarchical, organisations. They are unlike bureaucracies or military services in which some individuals have the authority to give commands to others.

Privileged Groups

Yet anyone with the slightest knowledge of actual legislatures recognises that in reality there are all kinds of differences between members. Such differences take two general forms: *hierarchy* (vertical differentiation) and *specialisation* (functional or horizontal differentiation). These forms of differentiation are rarely laid down in the constitution, yet they can be found with amazing regularity and in intricate detail. We can think of them generally as forms of *legislative organisation*. Krehbiel defines legislative organisation as 'the allocation of resources and assignment of parliamentary rights to individual legislators or groups of legislators'.⁶ Legislative organisation defines a set of *privileged groups*, sub-groups of parliamentarians with specific powers, and a set of *procedures* that specifies the powers of these sub-groups with respect to the functions that legislatures perform.

It was noted above that legislators are, in general, elected as equals, with undifferentiated voting rights. Any organisational rule that violates this equality, or anonymity, essentially defines one or several privileged groups. But the magnitude of these privileges varies greatly. Let us first consider the most general strong forms of privileged groups, which are dictators, decisive groups and veto groups. Weaker and more complex forms of privilege can then be derived from these pure types.

Dictators are groups that can unilaterally impose their will on the legislature. They can make legislative policy at will and they can similarly prevent any change in the *status quo*. In other words, their consent is both necessary and sufficient for a legislative decision. *Decisive groups* have the votes or authority to produce legislative action but they cannot necessarily prevent other groups from effecting action that they do not like. Their

consent, therefore, is sufficient but not necessary. Finally, *veto groups* can block any decision of which they do not approve but lack the power to impose their own preferences. Thus, their approval is necessary, but not sufficient. In legislatures, as in many other social systems, veto groups are probably the most common type of privileged group.

Committees are typically among the most important privileged groups in modern parliaments.⁷ Like most privileged groups in legislatures, however, their powers are normally weaker than those of dictators, decisive groups, or veto groups. Standing committees, for example, can be overridden by a determined floor majority, even under the decentralised procedure of the United States Congress. Yet, the powers vested in committees and similar privileged groups make such undertakings costly, risky and cumbersome.

WHY COMMITTEES?

Parliamentary committees are rarely mandated by constitution, yet they almost invariably exist. Therefore, we must look to the legislature itself, and to the interests of its members, to understand the rationale behind this organisation of their work. As noted above, legislative organisation generates two forms of differentiation: hierarchy and specialisation. Most committees are primarily vehicles of specialisation. Beyond that, legislative scholars have disagreed about the functions they assign to committees. The recent neo-institutional literature on legislatures stresses the following functions: (1) economies of operation, (2) gains from trade, (3) information acquisition, and (4) partisan co-ordination. These functions are discussed in turn.

Economies of Operation

A division of labour, such as a committee system permits, creates opportunities for legislative efficiencies in two obvious ways. One is that the greater the number of committees, the more parallel tracks of deliberation the legislature possesses. Given the perennial scarcity of time, numerous committees facilitate overall legislative productivity. This is, of course, most clearly the case with those stages of the legislative process that take place in committee, rather than on the floor. All else being equal, the larger the number of committees and the greater the part of the legislative process they perform, the higher the potential output of the parliament. The second efficiency stems from the indirect benefits that specialisation may engender, especially in the case of permanent committees with fixed jurisdictions and stable memberships. Here, legislators benefit from their familiarity with the substance and procedures they encounter in their respective committees, compared with the legislative agenda as a whole. All

accounts of legislative committees tend to stress their economies of operation in legislative and other tasks. Mezey, for one, has stressed this incentive toward an internal division of labour.⁸ The larger the legislature, and the greater the number of legislative committees, the more efficiently these economies of operation may be realised.

Economies of operation is a broad and relatively non-controversial function of parliamentary committees. Within this general understanding, however, students of parliamentary committees apply different perspectives, which are partly competing and partly complementary. Three such perspectives are discussed here: gains from trade, information acquisition and partisan co-ordination.

Gains from Trade

Early neo-institutional analyses of legislative institutions, at first almost exclusively focused on the United States Congress, gave pride of place to committees. This literature emerged in the late 1970s as an attempt to draw on informal insights to explain the apparent stability of policy choices in legislatures. This stability appeared to contradict the devastating 'chaos results' in the social choice literature, which seemed to suggest that legislative majorities should be highly unstable and cyclical.⁹ The neo-institutionalists saw legislative structures such as committees as the critical impediments to such chaos and sought to explain why legislators would choose to erect such barriers.

The early neo-institutionalists saw legislators as involved in collective choice situations that involve both some inescapable conflict over outcomes and some prospects for gains from trade.¹⁰ Potential gains from trade between legislators stem from the fact that they may have different policy goals, for example because their respective constituencies differ. Members from rural districts are likely to care much more about farm subsidies and much less about urban transit than representatives from major cities. If they do not do so for intrinsic personal reasons, they are forced to do so by electoral competition.¹¹

Such policy differences, which are particularly likely in single-member district systems or in very diverse societies, may induce legislators to engage in collectively inefficient 'log-rolling' deals, such as 'pork-barrel' projects.¹² The rural member may be happy to vote for urban transit in exchange for farm support, and vice versa. In the view of many neo-institutionalists, the rationale for legislative committees and various other legislative structures is to enforce such log-rolls. Committees enable members to make credible commitments because they assign 'property rights' over specific policy areas. The members of the agriculture committee can make policy on farm supports, and the members of the

transportation committee are empowered to decide on mass transit programmes. For committees to serve this function, several conditions must hold. Committees must enjoy some institutional advantages within their respective jurisdictions, such as proposal powers or gate-keeping powers, restrictive amendment rules, effective oversight functions, and so on. Moreover, non-committee members need to show deference to committees in floor voting. Finally, members must have a way to secure memberships on the committees about whose jurisdictions they care most.¹³

It follows from this perspective that committees would be expected to be autonomous and enjoy numerous policy-making privileges. Policy making would be decentralised and governed by restrictive rules. And committees would consist of 'high demanders' of whatever benefits the committee provides. Defence committees would be hawkish, social welfare committees spendthrift with respect to welfare benefits, agriculture committees generous to farm interests, and so forth. As a result, the legislature would spend more in each policy area than the median member would prefer.

Information Acquisition

The distributive perspective has been challenged by scholars who have stressed the critical role of information uncertainty in policy making.¹⁴ They remind us that the legislative majority routinely determines all committees' powers and voting rules and similarly approves all committee assignments. If these powers and assignments systematically thwarted the majority's will, then the members should not rationally adopt them. Thus, there is no reason to think that the legislative majority would put up with committees consisting of 'high demanders' that produce budget-busting legislation which the majority would oppose.

The informational premise highlights the constraints that affect the relationship between parliamentary decisions and policy outcomes. As even the casual student of legislative politics knows, the most well-intentioned pieces of legislation occasionally lead to results that no one anticipated or wanted. But legislators can mitigate some of these effects through policy specialisation. Through specialisation, and at some cost to themselves, committee members can gain private information about policy consequences. The trick for the legislature as a whole is to induce members to take the trouble to acquire expertise. This explains deference to committees on such matters as seniority privileges and restrictive rules.

The informational perspective implies that members would receive committee assignments that allow them to specialise at low cost, for example because of their professional training (medical personnel on health committees, lawyers on judiciary committees) or other prior experience. These members may occasionally also be high demanders, but the latter fact

is not the reason they are chosen. On the contrary, the confidence non-committee members can have in the committee increases with the heterogeneity of the policy preferences of the committee members. If radicals and conservatives on the committee agree, then floor members can safely defer to their recommendations. Committees, in summary, will include 'natural' specialists with heterogeneous preferences, but should not be biased toward high or low demanders.

Partisan Co-ordination

The third and last camp of neo-institutionalists see legislative committees (specifically those in the United States House of Representatives) as instruments of co-ordination wielded by the majority party.¹⁵ The literature on legislative committees has often related their importance to that of disciplined political parties. After reviewing the powers of parties and committees in eight national legislatures, Shaw concludes that they are inversely related: 'Where the committees are strongest ... one finds the lowest level of party control over the committees'.¹⁶ Presidential regimes are especially conducive to such powerful committees, but they are also to be found in parliamentary systems where no single party dominates the legislature.

Cox and McCubbins, however, put the conventional association between parties and committees into question, arguing that committees are extensions of party power. Parties arise to solve various 'collective dilemmas' legislators face, and committees are simply the extensions of their power. Following Mayhew, Cox and McCubbins stress the re-election motive of legislators. Since voters rely on party identification, legislators can benefit from the collective reputation their party provides. At the same time, each legislator seeks to improve his or her prospects by tailoring the party line to the district interest and by delivering benefits that the constituents value. The collective dilemma is that when all members engage in this behaviour, such entrepreneurship debases the party label. The legislators seek to solve this problem by delegating authority to party leaders, who are empowered to enforce discipline on the members ('whip' them) in the party's interest. Cox and McCubbins see legislative committees as the instruments of the majority party and, more specifically, its leadership. They therefore challenge the conventional notion that weak parties make for strong committees, and vice versa.¹⁷

Theoretical Implications

To put it simply, the three perspectives view committees, respectively, as (a) arenas of high demanders, (b) efficient vehicles of information acquisition, and (c) extensions of majority parties. They have distinctly different

empirical implications. One such difference concerns committee autonomy. In the first perspective, members of each committee determine policy within their jurisdiction, irrespective of party or floor preferences. In the second perspective, committees serve their parent chambers by developing expertise and acquiring information. Finally, the partisan perspective views committee members as agents or instruments of their parties. Since party leaders decide appointments, the party controls committee composition.

Although the perspectives differ in some respects, they have one common feature: they are institutional. Legislative organisation matters. Institutional structure, procedures and rules are assumed to affect the distribution of legislative power and, ultimately, public policy. The three perspectives also share a foundation in methodological individualism and the assumption of rational behaviour. Moreover, each perspective is informed by earlier and more inductive studies of legislative committees, the vast majority of which are studies of the United States Congress. It is reasonable to ask to what extent these perspectives are applicable to other parliaments as well. While the models cannot here either be extended analytically or tested empirically in any serious way, my exploration of European parliamentary committees is guided by their neo-institutionalist logic.

DATA

In shifting attention to an empirical investigation of structures, procedures and powers in west European parliamentary committees, my aim is primarily descriptive and comparative. Yet, the neo-institutional premises outlined above will guide the discussion of committees that follows. The data include only parliamentary committees engaged in the fulfilment of constitutional parliamentary duties (such as legislation, budgeting and/or control of the government) and focus on those with law-making functions. Committees established to direct the parliamentary administration or to organise the work of the assembly or to perform other duties in the management of the assembly (for example, library matters) are ignored. Nor are extra-parliamentary committees to which Members of Parliament belong or 'parliamentary delegations' (for example, delegations to the EU or EFTA) covered.

The main source of data is a research project directed by Herbert Döring. Data were collected by country specialists through a questionnaire and various follow-up efforts. The main source for the tables is a questionnaire sent to the country specialists in the autumn of 1994. Unless otherwise indicated, the information refers to the respective parliaments as of 1 January 1990. The project sought to cover all the major states of western

Europe: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. Further details on the project, participants and procedures can be found in Döring.¹⁸

COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Though it is customary to refer to legislative committees as if they were a well-defined phenomenon, in reality they come in almost endless varieties. Committees diverge in functions, size, composition, degree of institutionalisation and along many other dimensions. This section describes and compares the following important structural features of European parliamentary committees: (1) types and tenure, (2) numbers, (3) size of legislative committees, (4) jurisdictions and their correspondence with ministerial departments, (5) restrictions on multiple memberships, and finally (6) subcommittees.

Types and Tenure

Committees exist for any number of different purposes. The most important such purposes reflect key institutional tasks such as law making, budgeting and administrative oversight. Yet, legislatures also routinely establish committees to look after parliamentary household tasks or to serve as liaisons to outside agencies and institutions, including international organisations. Shaw distinguishes between the following committee purposes: (1) the legislative purpose, (2) the financial purpose, (3) the investigative purpose, (4) the administrative oversight purpose, and (5) the housekeeping purpose.¹⁹ The final category may be the least familiar to the more casual observer of legislatures. Some such committees, in fact, have a high status and considerable powers, for example, the Rules Committee in the United States House of Representatives. The Council of Elders (*Ältestenrat*) in the German Bundestag, though not technically a committee, serves a similarly critical function, as does the Main Committee in the Austrian National Council. Examples of more mundane housekeeping operations would be committees charged with administration of the parliamentary staff and ethics committees.

One of the most consequential distinguishing properties of legislative committees is their tenure. Whereas some committees are established and maintained for long-term purposes, others are formed and abolished in short order to deal with specific, one-shot issues. The literature generally distinguishes between permanent (or standing) and *ad hoc* committees. Permanent committees have fixed memberships and jurisdictions over an entire legislative term or longer (or in a less strict definition, at least over an

entire parliamentary session).²⁰ *Ad hoc* committees have no fixed duration and generally dissolve after they have completed their designated task. A note of caution is in order, however, as committees called standing (for instance, in the United Kingdom) do not always meet the requirements specified here. To avoid such confusion, therefore, reference is made to committees that meet certain minimum standards of durability as *permanent*, rather than standing.

Obviously, these variables generate a very substantial number of committee types. In practice, however, some types are more important than others, and existing legislatures gravitate towards a smaller number of committee arrangements. Schellknecht identifies ten different types, and my analysis employs a simplified version of his typology.²¹ A distinction is made between four main types. First, (a) *ad hoc* committees should be distinguished from permanent committees. Among permanent committees we can differentiate between committees that are (b) law making by function, (c) specialised and (d) non-law making. Law-making committees prepare legislation but may have additional functions. They may further differentiate their law-making functions. For instance, one committee might prepare civil law and another constitutional law; alternatively the committees might divide legislative responsibilities by geographical region. However, they are not specialised by policy area; in contrast, specialised committees are divided by policy area. The final class includes committees that have non-legislative functions. Thus, the classification takes both tenure, functions, and division of labour into account. Additionally, the analysis identifies joint committees in bicameral parliaments.

Committee Numbers

Committee systems vary with respect to the number of committees. Gordon Smith claims that there is an inverse relationship between the number of committees and executive power, as 'the greater the number of small groups, the less amenable to government control they are than a single, large one'.²²

Neo-institutional theories also imply that the number of committees matters. Economies of operation imply that as the number of committees increases, more bills can be dealt with at the same time. Beyond this basic proposition, different neo-institutional perspectives approach the issue from different angles. A cornerstone assumption in the distributive perspective is that the committees are independent from the party leadership. The partisan co-ordination perspective, which by no means precludes strong committees – on the contrary – emphasises party control of the committees. If both Smith and Cox and McCubbins are right, one might expect fewer parliamentary committees the more party leaders control them.

Tables 1 and 2 report the number of different types of committees in each parliament in this study, focusing on law-making committees. Most parliaments in western Europe rely on about 10–20 specialised committees to scrutinise legislative bills. Few parliaments (only Denmark and the Netherlands) have established more than 20 permanent law-making committees. At the other extreme are Ireland and the United Kingdom, which have no permanent committees with legislative functions. Ireland makes use of committees only very sparingly. Neither the Dáil nor the Senad features specialised committees established to prepare legislation.

The British House of Commons – in many respects the most deviant case – establishes *ad hoc* committees to prepare individual bills or refers them to one of its so-called standing (though not permanent) committees. Each bill is normally assigned to an *ad hoc* committee established for that purpose. Committees are set up by the House of Commons as and when need arises and are known simply as Committee A, B, C, and so on.²³ Additionally, the following standing committees also review legislation: the Scottish Grand Committee, the Welsh Grand Committee, and the Northern Ireland Committee. Formally, these committees are *ad hoc* committees, but in practice their tenure is permanent. However, they are not specialised and their legislative function is marginal. The regional grand committees meet four or five times a session and debate legislation and other matters affecting their geographical domain. Though they can pass motions, they cannot bind the House of Commons. The House of Commons also maintains a set of select committees to scrutinise specific aspects of government administration. One such committee is the Public Accounts Committee, always chaired by a leading opposition Member of Parliament, which audits government expenditure and publicises instances of waste and financial mismanagement. In 1979, the Commons established 14 select committees to monitor the policies and activities of the ministerial departments.²⁴

Besides Ireland and the United Kingdom, all of the parliaments considered maintain specialised committees to scrutinise legislative bills.²⁵ Earlier, Denmark maintained numerous *ad hoc* committees similar to the British ones, but in 1971 permanent committees were established. The extensive number of committees in the Folketing permits far-reaching diversification and a high degree of specialisation. There are, for instance, committees established to deal with Science and Technology, Immigration, and the Environment.²⁶ There were about 40 committees in the Dutch Second Chamber in 1990, 34 of which were permanent.²⁷

At the other extreme, the French National Assembly has only six committees to consider all legislative proposals in their respective jurisdictions. In 1958, the French constitution framers wished to avoid the proliferation of standing committees that had taken place under the Fourth

TABLE I
COMMITTEE STRUCTURE IN LOWER HOUSE

	Number of Committees				Joint Committees	Size of Legislative Committees (min-max)		Multiple Membership Restrictions (max. No.)	Subcommittees (number)
	Ad-hoc	Permanent				Ad-hoc	Permanent		
		Legislative by Function	Specialised	Non- Legislative					
Austria (Nationalrat)	0	0	17	8	1	-	13/27	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist ¹ (13)
Belgium (Kamer der Volksvertegen- woordigers)	2	1	11	4	0	23/23	10/23	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist (<5)
Denmark (Folketing)	2	0	22	2	-	17/17	17/21	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist ² (0)
Finland (Eduskunta)	n.a.	1 ³	12 ⁴	0	-	n.a.	11/45	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist (9)
France (Assemblée Nationale)	3	1	6	1	1	30/31	up to 145	yes (1)	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Germany (Bundestag)	2	0	19	2	2	-	13/37	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist (16)
Greece	n.a.	0	6	2	-	20/30	38/50 ⁵⁾	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Iceland (Althingi, Lower House)	0	0	9	1	0	-	up to 7	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Ireland (Dáil)	n.a.	0	0	3	6 ⁶⁾	n.a.	-	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Italy (Camera dei Deputati)	at least 3	0	13	6	6	not fixed 5-47	not fixed 5-47	yes (1) ⁷⁾	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Luxembourg (Chambre des Députés)	n.a. [*]	0 [*]	19 [*]	4 [*]	-	n.a.	5/13	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Netherlands (Tweede Kamer)	n.a.	0	29	5	n.a.	4/26	4/26	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist (1)
Norway (Storting)	0	0	12	4	-	-	10/18	yes (1) ⁹⁾	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Portugal	8	0	12	2	-	up to 12	up to 12	yes (2) ¹⁰⁾	neither mandated nor

(Assembleia da República)									prohibited, but exist (n.a.)
Spain (Congreso de los Diputados)	exist; but No. not fixed	0	11	8	-	size not fixed	size not fixed	no	mandated (n.a.)
Sweden (Riksdag)	0	0	16	1 ¹¹	-	-	17/17 ¹²	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Switzerland (Nationalrat)	- ¹¹	0 ¹⁴	12 ¹⁴	0 ¹⁴	- ¹¹	-	about 25	yes (2)	exist ¹⁵ (n.a.)
UK (House of Commons)	No. not fixed; at least 2	4 ¹⁶	0	19	3	16/50 ¹⁷	¹⁸	no	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist (4)

Notes

- 1 Exceptions: the standing subcommittee of the Main Committee is required by the constitution, the standing subcommittee of the Budget Committee by constitutional law.
- 2 The Europe Committee has a subcommittee which deals with procedural matters.
- 3 The name of the committee which is legislative by function is the Grand Committee (Suuri Valiokunta). Every bill must be considered in the Grand Committee between its first and second reading.
- 4 Five committees are formally permanent, whereas seven committees are so-called regular ad-hoc committees. According to our definition, all these committees are permanent.
- 5 Committees with the same names and competencies are also established at the beginning of every summer in order to consider bills submitted to the vacation session of the Chamber (from July to September); these committees consist of from 14 to 17 MPs.
- 6 Data refer to 1992.
- 7 Exceptions exist for the replacement of government members and for groups with fewer members than committees.
- 8 Data refer to 1992.
- 9 Some are also members of the Control Committee.
- 10 3, if the group is too small to be represented on all committees.
- 11 The Riksdag Auditors is not called a committee in the Swedish Riksdag Act, but is a committee according to the definition used here.
- 12 According to the Riksdag Act, there should be at least 15 in each committee.
- 13 Ad-hoc joint committees for special issues.
- 14 The committee for foreign policy has a standing subcommittee for European questions.
- 15 Data refer to the situation after 1991.
- 16 Regional committees; formally ad-hoc (Standing Committees) but in practice they are 'semi-permanent'.
- 17 Usually 18.
- 18 The Scottish Grand Committee includes not fewer than 16 Members representing Scottish constituencies. The Welsh Grand Committee consists of all Members sitting for Welsh seats, plus not more than five other members nominated by the Committee of Selection. The Northern Ireland Committee consists of all Members sitting for constituencies in Northern Ireland plus not more than 25 other members nominated by the Committee of Selection. The Standing Committee on Regional Affairs consists of all Members sitting for English constituencies, plus up to five others.

TABLE 2
COMMITTEE STRUCTURE IN UPPER HOUSE

	Number of Committees				Size of Legislative Committees (min-max)		Subcommittees (number)
	Ad-Hoc	Permanent			Ad-Hoc	Permanent	
		Legislative by Function	Specialised	Non-Legislative			
Austria	0	0	10	3	n.a.	17/17	prohibited
Belgium (Chambre des Représentants)	0	1	13	5	-	22/22	not mandated (n.a.)
France (Senat)	1	1	6	1	21/24	40/77	mandated by §39.4 SO (0)
Germany (Bundesrat)	0	0	18	0	-	n.a.	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Iceland (Althingi, Upper House)	0	0	9	1	-	up to 7	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Ireland (Seanad)	n.a.	0	0	2	n.a.	-	neither mandated nor prohibited, but none exist (0)
Italy							
Netherlands (Eerste Kamer)	2	0	19	3	n.a.	13/13	neither mandated nor prohibited, but hardly ever used
Spain							
Switzerland	- ¹		12			13	exist ²
UK	at least 1	0	0	2	0	15/24	neither mandated nor prohibited, but exist (n.a.)

Notes:

1. Ad hoc joint committees for special issues
2. The committee for foreign policy has a standing subcommittee for European question

Republic, in which parliamentary committees came to comprise small numbers of highly expert members. That committee structure fostered sectional interest influence on parliamentary deliberation.²⁸ Inspired by the French model, Greece also has established only six specialised committees. Besides France and Greece, only the parliaments of Iceland (nine) and Spain (four) feature fewer than ten specialised committees.

In some countries, such as France, the constitution limits the number of committees, whereas in other countries the parliaments are free to organise their own committees, which can lead to numerical fluctuations from year to year. In West Germany, for instance, the number of committees dropped from 39 in the first Bundestag to 36 in the second due to a decline in the number of parliamentary parties.²⁹

As described above, the main difference between the committee structures of parliaments is whether permanent or *ad hoc* committees are used for legislation. However, even countries with permanent legislative committees vary. Some rely solely on specialised committees, whereas others have established other committees, *ad hoc* or permanent, for various functions. In the first case specialised committees are multi-functional and in the other case functions are dispersed. In summary, parliaments mainly feature either *ad hoc* law-making committees (Britain and Ireland), specialised, uni-functional committees (Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland), or specialised, multi-functional committees (the remaining countries in this study).

Bicameral parliaments quite often feature joint committees of the two Houses. Their functions may vary, but one distinct task is to mediate in the event of inter-chamber disagreement. Germany has established a special inter-chamber Mediation Committee for this purpose,³⁰ and similar committees exist in Austria, France, Ireland, and the United Kingdom. However, the British Parliament does not involve committees in resolving differences between the two chambers.³¹

Committee Size

The next structural feature is *committee size*. Small committees increase, it is assumed, the incentives to specialise. The possibility of monopolising expertise in parliament increases as committee size lessens. The informational perspective should therefore be particularly applicable in parliaments with small committees. As it happens, the size of west European legislative committees varies within a surprisingly wide range from a handful of members to as many as 145 parliamentarians.³² The largest committees, consisting of up to 145 members, are found in the French Assemblée Nationale, whereas committees in the Icelandic Althingi have but a handful of members. One obvious explanation lies in the

different sizes of the parliaments. Although there are exceptions, committee size is generally related to the size of the parliament. The number of members may be fixed for all or for certain types of committees. However, some parliaments – excluding those of Austria, Finland (where the minimum varies depending on the type of committee), Iceland (maximum seven), Portugal (maximum 12), Spain, and Sweden (minimum 15) – lack decisive regulations concerning maximum or minimum committee size.

If discretionary, committee size might be an issue of political controversy, as in the United States Congress, which can fuel a process of increasing committee size.³³ The case of Austria demonstrates that size negotiations also occur in western Europe. Committee members are formally elected, but in practice the *Klubs* of the parliamentary parties present decisive nominations for each committee. Since the distribution of committee seats among the parties is proportional, inter-party negotiations focus on the exact number of members on each committee. In Sweden, the minimum size has twice been increased to 17 members to meet demands from the Green Party, which otherwise would not have been represented under proportional distribution (d'Hondt's formula). Similar demands from the Left Party (Communists) have, however, occasionally been ignored.

Jurisdictions

Committee jurisdictions vary extensively. *Ad hoc* committees are often appointed with a very specific and narrow mandate, such as a particular bill before parliament or a particular issue under investigation. Permanent committees differ substantially. Some committees have monopoly 'property rights' over all legislation and budgeting in a particular policy area, defined by parliament itself or by the jurisdictions of executive branch departments. This property right is effective if the parent chamber regularly follows the committee's recommendations regardless of their content. Other legislatures divide their work according to function so that some committees handle law making, others appropriations, yet others revenues, others again administrative oversight, and so on.

Informational needs are best served if members know that they will serve on the same committee for an extended time. Expertise acquisition is also facilitated if the scope of the committee's jurisdiction is narrow and well defined, which should be easier to achieve as the number of committees increases. For oversight purposes, it is important whether committee jurisdictions correspond with those of the government.³⁴ Correspondence facilitates influence through expert knowledge and enables individual committee members to build personal networks. Senior committee members usually become familiar with the administrative agencies and with relevant outside interest groups.

Multiple Membership Restrictions

An informational logic also justifies an investigation of regulations on multiple membership, since specialisation facilitates committee influence. Specialisation and expertise can be reinforced if committee members concentrate their work on one and only one committee. In reality, few parliaments limit the number of committees on which a member may serve, as shown in Table 1. Restrictions exist in France, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal and Switzerland. In the Spanish Congress of Deputies, each Member is entitled to serve on at least one committee, and in practice this is also the case in Norway.³⁵ In all other parliaments, there are members who do not serve on any committee. Thus, although there is little formal regulation of the number of permissible memberships, few members actually serve on more than one or two committees, even where this is in principle possible.³⁶ Norway stands out as a special case. It is the only country with a specialised committee system in which each legislator serves on one and only one committee. There are 165 seats in the 12 permanent committees and precisely 165 delegates to occupy them.

Subcommittees

Finally, the committees' internal delegation through subcommittees is considered. Some committees have elaborate internal differentiation, whereas others do not. The most important forms of such differentiation are subcommittees. Subcommittees may be formally established by the standing orders of parliament, or they may exist on a more informal basis. The creation of subcommittees may be at the discretion of the committee itself, or it may be prohibited. When subcommittees exist, their agenda powers *vis-à-vis* the larger committee are critical to the fate of bills. Even without subcommittees, committees may develop very extensive procedures by which they internally delegate and differentiate their work. In some parliaments, each member serves as a floor rapporteur on some specific set of bills, often in many consecutive sessions, and internal committee deliberations may reflect this division of labour.

Subcommittees affect legislative process and output for several reasons. First, small subcommittees with relatively narrow jurisdictions can restrict the range of political interests represented in committee, particularly if subcommittee membership is based on self-selection, as tends to be the case in the United States.³⁷ Subcommittees may therefore deviate even more from the preferences of the full House than their parent committees.³⁸ Legislation could consequently be biased even more towards particularistic interests, leading to under-production of highly aggregated collective-benefit bills and over-production of petty special-benefits legislation.³⁹ On the other hand, informational perspectives suggest that subcommittees may be an effective way to let Members of Parliament specialise at low cost.

Second, if subcommittees bias interest representation, it may cause more conflict in full committee and on the floor than might otherwise occur. As the internal decision-making costs decrease with the further division of labour, the external risks increase.

Third, subcommittees represent a trade-off between the benefits of greater division of labour among members and the costs of an additional step in the legislative process. A division of labour increases the capacity to consider many issues simultaneously. An additional step in the legislative process, on the other hand, may impede effective legislation. Students of the United States Congress have found that active subcommittees tend to increase jurisdictional conflicts between as well as within committees.⁴⁰

Where the number of subcommittees is not constitutionally or otherwise regulated, it may be a subject of political dispute. This is especially likely if the Members of Parliament have incentives to become subcommittee members. These incentives can, for instance, be resources controlled by a subcommittee or its chair. If it is less costly to lobby for an increase in the number of subcommittees than to compete for a seat in an established subcommittee, the number of subcommittees might rise, as had occurred in the United States Senate by the early 1970s, when there were more subcommittees than there were senators.⁴¹

The parliaments of Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the United Kingdom employ subcommittees.⁴² The remaining parliaments have not established formal subcommittees, though only the Austrian Federal Council prohibits them. In some cases, however, committees utilise informal sub-groups. A few examples may illuminate this. According to a 1989 amendment of the 1987 standing orders, each of the six permanent committees in Greece may split into subcommittees. The subcommittees correspond to each of the ministries whose policy area fall under the competence of the relevant permanent committee. Subcommittees comprise 10–20 members and their competence is restricted to hearings involving public officials.

French permanent committees are few and large, with broad and vague jurisdictions. They do, however, form smaller working groups on specific bills, which allows opposition members legislative influence and responsibility.⁴³ Subcommittees were eschewed in the early years of the Fifth Republic, probably because the Gaullists feared that they might develop into oppositional power centres. But as time has passed, such sub-division has in fact taken place. *Groupes de travail* have been formed frequently and are now officially sanctioned.⁴⁴ In Sweden, subcommittees are not formally forbidden, but none exist. Occasionally, committees appoint a few of their members to perform a certain task, typically a minor practical issue. However, such appointments are informal and the appointed

members are not entitled to any authority or responsibility beyond those derived from their membership in the parent committee.

In several countries, however, subcommittees exist on a more regular basis. The German Bundestag neither requires nor prohibits subcommittees. However, fully ten subcommittees are at work, most notably four each in the committees on Foreign Affairs and Economic Affairs.⁴⁵ In the Netherlands, the Second Chamber regulates potential subcommittees in the Standing Orders (Art. 42). In the First Chamber, the Standing Orders permit committees to establish one or more subcommittees consisting of at least three members. However, this right is hardly ever used. The large Finnish Finance Committee is divided into nine sections in which both full members and deputies serve. Members and deputy members have equal rights in sectional meetings. The committee has a heavy workload since it deals with the state budget.⁴⁶

Subcommittees thus exist in a majority of the countries under study. Yet few studies have so far addressed their properties or functions. While subcommittees play a very important role in the United States Congress, particularly since the 1970s,⁴⁷ their role in west European parliaments appears to be more limited. There seems, however, to be good reason to devote future attention to this neglected subject in European politics.

COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

Committee procedures tell us a lot about the organisational principles of a parliament. This section examines five different committee procedures: (a) committee assignments; (b) chair selection and allocation; (c) committee openness; (d) minority reports; and (e) the committee stage in legislative deliberation. These procedures jointly define the conditions under which the committees do their legislative work.

Each of the theoretical perspectives presented in this article generates expectations concerning committee procedures. From the distributive perspective, to enforce gains from trade, standing committees will be granted favoured procedural status throughout the process, such as closed rules, *ex post* vetoes or gate-keeping powers.⁴⁸ Informational theory, on the other hand, predicts that parliaments establish and practise restrictive procedural rules when it facilitates specialisation, even at the expense of reduced possibilities for distributive trade. In the partisan co-ordination perspective, majority party leaders control the agenda and grant committee independence only when they can retain control of the legislative process.⁴⁹

Committee Assignments

Committee assignments can be a contentious procedure. To party leaders, committee assignments are important for two reasons. First, a good

assignment is an important reward for loyal and hard working members. Members pursue committee assignments that allow them to deliver benefits to their constituency or local party organisation which, in turn, facilitates renomination and reelection. Second, committee assignments are vital to party policy.⁵⁰ Seniority rules and stable assignments enable members to invest time and energy in acquiring expertise in their policy areas and building up personal networks. By choosing reliable committee members and chairs, leaders can indirectly control the party's long-range policy positions.

Procedures for committee assignments vary. Some parliaments centralise these procedures so that party leaders normally have a decisive role. Other parliaments grant committee independence. Seat allocations among the parties reveal what role opposition parties play in parliamentary committees. Some parliaments enhance the consensus-building role that committees can play by giving minority parties proportional committee representation, whereas in other parliaments the government strictly controls its committee majority. A consensual pattern can be reinforced if the chairs are also distributed among both government and opposition parties.

Although committee assignments thus contain potential conflicts, they appear to be handled consensually in most parliaments much of the time. Membership is (at least roughly) proportional, with seat allocations based on the relative sizes of the party groups.⁵¹ The allocations are regulated either in the constitution (for example, Denmark), by other laws, by the rules of procedure (for example, Austria), or is based on custom (for example, the Select Committees in the British House of Commons).⁵² In Germany, members of the Bundesrat committees are nominated by the states. Each state has one vote on every committee, reflecting the federal constitution.

Most legislative committees are true sub-sets of the legislature: only legislators may be members and the total committee membership is smaller than that of parliament as a whole. One exception to the second part of this rule is the Committee of the Whole House, which is widely used in countries of the Westminster parliamentary tradition.⁵³ More commonly, exceptions are made to the rule that only legislators can be committee members. Some parliaments feature committees whose members may be drawn from outside its membership, though this practice is, on the whole, rare. The most important such arrangement may be where cabinet members, even if they are not elected representatives (or if they are barred from serving as legislators during their tenure in the executive branch), may nevertheless participate in the deliberations of the legislative committee corresponding to their department's jurisdiction. In bicameral legislatures, some (but typically only few) committees may have members from both legislative chambers.

Chair Selection and Allocation

Committee chairs can be appointed by the House, the committee itself, the Speaker, or by some other body. In some parliaments the Speaker is the *ex officio* chair of certain committees.⁵⁴ Although rules can differ between committees within a single parliament, chairs are generally elected by their own committees, and this applies in particular to law-making committees. Only Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom have different procedures. In Italy the chairs are elected by the Chamber, and in Switzerland they are nominated by the Bureau. Germany is once again a special case due to its federal structure. In the Bundesrat, the seats are distributed between the states, whereas the Bundestag distributes the committee chairs according to the relative size of the parties. In the British House of Commons, chairs are selected by the Speaker from the Chairmen's Panel, a group of about 20 senior backbenchers from both sides of the House.⁵⁵ Although chair selection in Britain is focused on seniority rather than partisanship, most chairs belong to the majority. In the Netherlands, the Speaker appoints both committee members and chairs, but in practice he is left little choice. Proportional representation dictates membership composition and chair allocation among the parties. The leaderships of the parliamentary party groups meet informally to discuss which party will get which chair. One of the considerations during these negotiations appears to be that the chair should not be given to the respective minister's party.⁵⁶

This is the formal story. As the cases of the United Kingdom and the Netherlands partly illuminate, the selection of chairs may also be negotiated between party representatives, particularly in parliaments where chairs are distributed among several parties. It seems to be common that even in parliaments where committees elect their chairs, they only ratify decisions that have already been settled elsewhere.⁵⁷

No strict seniority procedure for chair appointments seems to exist in any west European parliament. It is nonetheless reasonable to assume that seniority matters when chairs are appointed. But partisanship and general parliamentary seniority presumably matter much more than service on the particular committee in question.

The chair assignment process may result either in a majoritarian or in a proportional distribution. The leadership of the majority party monitors the committees more easily if all chairs are allocated to its members. The actual allocation of chairs among parties varies, as shown in Table 3. In six countries, all or most chairs routinely go to the majority party or parties. French attempts toward proportional representation, for example, have been unsuccessful.⁵⁸ Most parliaments, however, allocate chairs more or less proportionally among the parties, though small deviations from strict

proportionality sometimes occur. Moreover, some parliaments actually reserve chairs for the opposition. This applies mainly to committees with control tasks such as auditing public expenditure.⁵⁹

Public or Private Meetings

A further procedural aspect is committee openness, that is to say the public or private nature of committee deliberations. The choice between public or private committee meetings affects the committee members' informational advantages. Public meetings dissipate some of the informational advantages committee members may acquire. Open committee meetings enable the party leaderships to monitor the performance of committee members and enforce strict party discipline. Even if public meetings do not actually diffuse information, the mere fact that committees meet in private can give their members an advantage, as long as other members believe that important information resides behind the closed doors. Public meetings, on the other hand, turn committee meetings into potential advertising fora for committee members. The members might use the meetings for such re-election purpose as credit claiming, advertising and position taking.⁶⁰ Open meetings are therefore less likely to foster inter-party compromise.

In all our parliaments, committee members and substitutes, as well as the authorised parliamentary staff, may attend committee meetings. Apart from that, the rules concerning provisions for committee attendance vary widely. As shown in Table 3, the public may in principle attend all committee meetings in Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, while these committees are in a legislative mode. In Britain, verbatim published reports of standing committee proceedings facilitate party oversight.⁶¹ In Spain, committee meetings are open to the mass media which, of course, make them far from private even if the mass public cannot attend.

By contrast, committee meetings in the remaining parliaments are in principle not open to the public. But even among these parliaments, members of parliament who are not regular or substitute members of the committee may, at least under certain circumstances or in certain committees, also attend meetings. The rules vary, but in principle all MPs may attend all committee meetings in Austria, France, Germany and Greece. Denmark allows certain non-committee MPs to attend committee meetings under special circumstances.⁶² In Finland, Iceland, Luxembourg, Norway and Sweden, committee meetings are closed to all but committee members and staff (or other authorised persons) when the committees prepare legislation.

However, what has been described here is only the main pattern. In many cases, mixed rules apply. In Portugal, for instance, committees can decide to open their meetings to the public. In Greece, committee meetings

TABLE 3
COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

	Chairs		Meetings	Minority Reports	Committee Stage in Deliberation
	Selection	Allocation			
Austria	Committee	Mainly majority party	Other rules ¹	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Belgium	Committee	Proportional	Other rules ³	Right exists but practice is unclear; country-specific limitation	Before plenary stage
Denmark	Committee	Proportional	Open to committee members and certain MPs	Right does not exist	After plenary stage
Finland	Committee	Proportional	Closed	The right exists	Before plenary stage
France	Committee	Mainly majority party	Open to all MPs	Right does not exist	Before plenary stage
Germany	House/Committee ⁴	Other/proportional ⁵	Open to all MPs	Right exists but practice is unclear; country-specific limitation	Before plenary stage
Greece	Committee	Majority party only	Open to all MPs ⁶	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Iceland	Committee	Mainly majority party	Closed	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Ireland	Committee ⁷	By agreement in the committee or by majority decision	Ad-hoc committees are open to public; the existing permanent committees do not consider bills	Right does not exist	After plenary stage
Italy	House	Majority party only ⁸	Other rules ⁹	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Luxembourg	Committee	Proportional	Closed	Right does not exist	Before plenary stage
Netherlands	Speaker/Committee ¹⁰	Proportional ¹¹	Lower House: open to public ¹² Upper House: closed	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Norway	Committee	Proportional ¹³	Closed	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Portugal	Committee	Proportional	Open to all MPs. Open to the mass media when dealing with legislation. Meeting can be made open to the public by committee decision	Right exists but practice is unclear; country-specific limitation	Before plenary stage

TABLE 3 (cont'd)

	Chairs		Meetings	Minority Reports	Committee Stage in Deliberation
	Selection	Allocation			
Spain	Committee	(Proportional) ¹⁴	Open to all MPs and the mass media	Right exists but practice is unclear; country-specific limitation	After plenary stage
Sweden	Committee	Proportional	Closed	The right exists	Before plenary stage
Switzerland	Bureau ¹⁵	Distributed equally among the parties	Closed	The right exists	Before plenary stage
UK	House/Speaker ¹⁶	Mainly majority party	Open to public	Right does not exist	After plenary stage

Notes:

- 1 Participation includes in addition to committee members: the president and vice-president of the National Council, other deputies, ministers and state secretaries and members of the parliamentary and government bureaucracy, and experts from interest groups.
Government members are not allowed to participate in meetings of the Main Committee and its sub-committees. The president and vice-president of the audit office may take part in committee meetings dealing with its reports and the budget accounts.
- 2 Senate: the president is *ex-officio* chair of certain committees.
Chamber of Representatives: 1 permanent committee chaired by president. President and vice-president are *ex-officio* chairs of certain committees.
- 3 About half of the meetings are public, as for budgets, bills accepted and transferred by the other chamber, interpellations and questions held in committee.
- 4 Federal Council: elected by the House from among committee members.
Federal Diet: Elected by each committee in accordance with arrangements of the Council of Elders.
- 5 Federal Council: distributed between states.
Federal Diet: proportional to party strength.
- 6 Open to public only at the initial stage of committee work on pending bills.
- 7 Except for the Joint committee on a Private Bill where the chair is jointly appointed by the chairs of each House.
- 8 If no majority achieved, 'Stichwahl' between the two candidates with equal votes; if not successful, principle of seniority and finally of age decides (art. 20 SO).
- 9 All other deputies have the right to participate, without right to vote and publicity by closed-circuit TV in separate room.
- 10 First Chamber: appointed by the president from among committee members.
Second Chamber: elected by each committee.
- 11 First Chamber: distributed among fractions on the basis of agreement between their leaders.
Second Chamber: distributed proportionally among the larger fractions.
- 12 Exceptions: for example meetings of the permanent committee for Intelligence and Security Services and meetings dealing with letters to a committee or discussing procedural matters.
- 13 Proportional to their strength and depending partly upon tradition and partly upon agreement among party groups.
- 14 No specific rules. In practice they are distributed according to strength of the two main parties.
- 15 Nominated by the respective bureau.
- 16 House of Lords: selected by the House, or in default, by the committee.

are not open to the public when the committees consider legislation. However, according to a 1993 amendment to the 1987 standing orders, meetings are opened to the public at the initial stage, when the general orientation of the bill is examined. Exceptions to this rule are allowed with the speaker's approval if the committee itself requests a private meeting. Yet, in general, meetings are private. In the Netherlands, on the other hand, the general rule since 1980 is that all committee meetings in the Second Chamber are public. However, there are exceptions, including meetings dealing with committee letters or procedural matters. Committee meetings in the First Chamber are open to all Members of Parliament but closed to the public.

Minority Reports

Some parliaments allow committee minorities to submit minority reports. Minority reports can serve as effective vehicles of information to the floor. Where minority reports are allowed, the floor may gain either several policy options or an assurance that the report represents a cross-partisan consensus. Some minority reports also include a statement of the minority's rationale. If minority reports, as in Sweden, have the same form as a committee report and therefore are directly substitutable for the committee report or parts of it, members of the committee minority have added incentives to specialise and to take their tasks in committee seriously.

The measure in Table 3 is Herbert Döring's indicator of minority rights to append committee reports. The variable has three categories: (1) an indisputable right to attach minority reports exists; (2) the right probably exists but practice is unclear or restricted by certain country-specific limitations; and (3) the right does not exist. The data were compiled in collaboration with Thomas Saalfeld and the country experts in the Döring project.

Such minority rights exist in nine parliaments, while they do not exist in five. In the remaining cases, practice is unclear or minority rights are restricted. Parliaments that do not permit minorities to submit reports include those of Denmark, France, Ireland, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom. In these parliaments, the majority party (and the government) thus has important prerogatives regarding agenda control and legislative initiatives.⁶³

The detailed rules for submitting minority reports vary significantly even where the right exists. Let us describe the procedures in one case only for the purpose of illustration. In Sweden, any dissenting member (alone or in collaboration with other members, regardless of party) may attach a reservation to a committee report. This reservation may deal with a small part of the committee report or with its full contents, including any

committee recommendations. The minority report may contest the majority conclusions but may also (or solely) focus on their intent, which may be critical for subsequent implementation of the decision. If an agency administering a law encounters a difficulty of interpretation, it can go back to the majority *and the minority* report for motivations. The basic requirements for a minority report are that it should deal only with matters included in the committee report and that it should be interchangeable with the committee report. The latter means that if a minority wants to alter one paragraph of the committee report, it must formulate the minority report in such a way that that paragraph could be substituted. In the plenary voting procedure, the main alternatives are the majority and minority reports, rather than the original bill.⁶⁴

Committee Stage in the Legislative Process

Our final procedural feature is the committee stage in deliberation. One frequently cited reason why American legislative committees are stronger than their British counterparts is that committee scrutiny in the former instance takes place prior to floor deliberations.⁶⁵ The pre-floor stage, which is generally regarded as the crucial part of the legislative process on Capitol Hill, belongs in the committees' domain. Since party cohesion is weak, the parties constitute floor voting coalitions rather than cohesive legislative organisations.⁶⁶ It is reasonable to suggest, more generally, that the role of committees increases if the major debate on a bill has not taken place before it is referred to them. Obviously, the 'property rights' identified by the distributive perspective cannot be enforced if the major floor debate takes place before committees have an opportunity to deliberate.

Only Denmark, Ireland, Spain and the United Kingdom place a plenary stage before committee scrutiny. The impact of this procedure, however, varies. Committees in the British House of Commons are severely limited by the previous floor deliberation. At first reading, a bill is introduced by a minister and published without debate. The general principles of the bill are discussed at the second reading. Major bills are then usually referred to the Committee of the Whole House, whereas lesser legislation goes to standing committees. A report stage follows, giving the plenary assembly a chance to debate the bill once again. Through this sequence, that is, by placing the committee stage after general plenary debate, the House of Commons severely constrains the committees' ability to consider bills independently of the agenda of the majority party. As a result, committee considerations are restricted to details only. The Danish Folketing, on the other hand, does not similarly constrain its committees since it sometimes refers to committee bills that it actually does not support.

COMMITTEE POWERS

Committees are critical to the deliberative powers of parliaments. As Mezey notes, legislatures with strong policy-making powers 'have highly developed committee systems which enable them to divide the legislative labor in such a way that a degree of legislative expertise is generated in most policy areas'.⁶⁷ Strong committees, it appears, are at least a necessary condition for effective parliamentary influence in the policy-making process. Whether they are also sufficient is less obvious.

Legislative committees carry out a variety of tasks in the legislative process, such as scrutinising bills, collecting information, proposing amendments, and recommending final decisions to the floor. For those purposes they are given various formal powers. These committee powers, however, vary considerably among parliaments. Committee powers will be defined here by the role of the committees in the policy-making process, and mainly by the ability of the committees to influence parliamentary outputs.⁶⁸ Committee power can have two forms, negative and positive.⁶⁹ Negative committee power is the ability to defend the *status quo* despite the pressure for change from other actors, whereas positive power is the ability to influence policy changes.⁷⁰ The extreme case of negative power is the veto player, of positive power the decisive player (see above). Autonomous committees, as described in the distributive perspective, have both negative (for example, refusing to report a bill to the floor and thereby blocking legislation) and positive power (for example, proposing legislation that the chamber is compelled to consider).

This section examines a selection of different committee powers, both positive and negative: (1) the committees' right to initiate legislation, (2) their right to rewrite bills, (3) their control of the committees' timetable, and (4) their methods of obtaining information – specifically the rights to summon witnesses and documents. These formal powers are likely to have an important impact on the committees' ability to influence legislation independently of such external actors as party leadership, chamber majorities, and the government.⁷¹

Initiation of Legislation

There are obvious reasons to examine the committees' right to initiate legislation themselves. The ability to set the legislative agenda is a crucial source of power. To be autonomous decision-making bodies, committees must stand free from government involvement in their internal affairs. Autonomous committees lend some support to the distributive perspective. The powers to initiate legislation and/or to organise the bills in such a way that the committees can reframe legislation, that is, the ability to split or

consolidate bills, are very important for the committees' possibilities to execute legislative powers.

Only a few countries empower their committees with initiative powers. In Austria, Iceland and Sweden, all committees have the right to initiate legislation.⁷² In Denmark, France, Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, on the other hand, committees are not even entitled to split or consolidate bills. Some committees, however, enjoy particularly broad decisional (legislative) powers. This is one of the distinguishing features of Italian committees: they can legislate directly through the (in)famous decentralised procedure. After a bill has been approved by the committee of one Chamber according to what is called the legislative procedure, the other Chamber's approval can be given by a committee instead of the floor. In fact, the lion's share of Italian legislation has been passed by committees and not by the floor. Note, however, that committees can only legislate if the legislation is essentially uncontested. At any time, the government or a tenth of the members of one Chamber may demand the normal floor procedure. Moreover, the Constitution (Art. 72) prohibits this procedure in matters of constitutional or electoral reform, concerning legislation relating to finance, in the ratification of international treaties, or in connection with the delegation of legislation.⁷³

In Denmark, the Finance Committee can decide, on behalf of the Folketing, on additional appropriations during the financial year. The role of the Chamber is restricted to a retroactive annual confirmation of appropriations already granted by the committee. Also, the Europe Committee (formerly the Market Committee) has a decisive function, since the ministers receive a negotiation mandate from it on behalf of the Folketing prior to meetings with the European Council of Ministers.⁷⁴

In Sweden, the conjoint committee of the Standing Committees of Finance and of Taxation can decide on financial matters when the Riksdag is adjourned. However, this conjoint committee has never actually met and is regarded as an institution for extraordinary situations only. Moreover, the decisional powers of these joint committees will be abolished in a Riksdag reform which is presently in process.⁷⁵

Committees with decisional powers of this kind are, however, exceptional. Moreover, they do not dominate legislation in any of the parliaments under study, except in Italy. In short, there is considerable variation in committee powers, as shown in Table 4.

Revision of Bills

Committees empowered to redraft bills have major agenda power advantages. By rewriting bills, the committees take over the agenda-setting powers of the original initiator. When the committees submit their reports to

TABLE 4
COMMITTEE POWERS

	Initiatives	Authority to Rewrite Bills	Control of Timetables	Hearings Right to Compel Witnesses	Openness	Documents
Austria	Right to initiate legislation (restricted)	Redraft of bill when substantial amendments are recommended	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can compel ¹	Always private	Can demand documents from government ²
Belgium	Right to consolidate and split bills, but no right to initiate legislation ³	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The committees themselves set their agenda; but right of recall by plenary	Can invite but not compel	Public or private	Can demand documents from persons/institutions not belonging to parliament
Denmark	No right to initiate, consolidate or split bills	House considers original government bill with amendments added	House may not reallocate bills to other committees	Can compel ⁴	Private	Cannot demand documents
Finland	Right to consolidate and split bills ⁵	Committees are free to rewrite government text	House may not reallocate bills to other committees	Can invite but not compel	Private	Can demand documents from government
France	No right to initiate, consolidate or split bills	House considers original government bill with amendments added	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can compel ⁶	Always private	Can demand documents
Germany	Right to consolidate and split bills	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The committees themselves set their agenda; but right of recall by plenary	Can invite but not compel	Public or private	Cannot demand documents
Greece	Right to consolidate and split bills	If redrafted text is not accepted by the relevant minister, chamber considers the original bill	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can invite but not compel	Private ⁷	Cannot demand documents

TABLE 4 (cont'd)

	Initiatives	Authority to Rewrite Bills	Control of Timetables	Hearings Right to Compel Witnesses	Openness	Documents
Iceland	Right to initiate legislation	Committees are free to rewrite government text	House may not reallocate bills to other committees	Can invite but not compel	Always private	Cannot demand documents
Ireland	<i>Ad hoc</i> committees have no right to initiate, consolidate or split bills; the existing permanent committees do not consider bills	House considers original government bill with amendments added	Bills tabled before the committees automatically constitute the agenda	No right to arrange hearings nor to compel anybody to submit documents for <i>ad-hoc</i> committees; the existing permanent committees do not consider bills	n.a.	Cannot demand documents ⁹⁾
Italy	Not the committee as such but each single deputy is entitled to initiate legislation	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can invite but not compel	Public or private	Cannot demand documents
Luxembourg	Right to consolidate and split bills, but no right to initiate legislation ⁹⁾	Committees may present substitute texts which are considered against the original text	The directing authority of the plenary body with the right of recall	Can invite but not compel	Always private	Can demand documents from persons /institutions not belonging to parliament
Netherlands	Lower House: No right to initiate, consolidate or split bills ¹⁰⁾ Upper House: not applicable	House considers original government bill with amendments added	House may not reallocate bills to other committees	Can invite but not compel	Public or private	Cannot demand documents
Norway	Right to consolidate and split bills, but no right to initiate legislation	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can invite but not compel ¹¹⁾	Always private	Cannot demand documents
Portugal	Right to consolidate and split bills	Communities may present substitute texts which are considered against the original text	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can compel ¹²⁾	Normally private ¹³⁾	Cannot demand documents

TABLE 4 (cont'd)

	Initiatives	Authority to Rewrite Bills	Control of Timetables	Hearings Right to Compel Witnesses	Openness	Documents
Spain	Right to consolidate and split bills	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The directing authority of the plenary body with right of recall	Can compel ¹⁴	Public and private	Can demand documents only from some individuals or government
Sweden	Right to initiate legislation	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The committees themselves set their agenda with no right for the plenary body to recall	Can invite but not compel	Public or private	Can demand documents from government institutions only
Switzerland	Right to initiate legislation	Committees are free to rewrite government text	The committees themselves set their agenda	Can invite anybody but not compel	Committees may declare hearings open	Can demand documents from government institutions
UK	No right to initiate, consolidate or split bills	House considers original government bill with amendments added	Bills tabled before the committees automatically constitute the agenda	No right	<i>n.a.</i>	Cannot demand documents

Notes:

- 1 Anybody.
- 2 All committees can demand written reports (§ 40 para. 1 and 2 of the standing orders), whereas only investigating committees can demand documents in search for evidence (§ 33 para. 4).
- 3 This right originated from practice; according to the Standing Order they have no such right.
- 4 Ministers.
- 5 Two committees have the right to initiate legislation.
- 6 Civil servants.
- 7 Public only at the initial stage of committee work.
- 8 Exceptions: The Committee of Public Accounts has the power to send for persons, papers and records.
- 9 This right originated from practice; according to the Standing Order they have no right to do it.
- 10 Formally, the Chamber can decide to instruct a committee to consider *if and how* a *non-government* bill should be introduced (Standing Orders art. 109). This has happened only twice, without any result. Therefore, non-government bills are, in practice, always introduced by one or more MPs, which means that they are always private member bills.
- 11 In the Upper House the consent of the entire Chamber is needed in order to arrange a public hearing.
- 12 Civil servants and employees of public enterprises. Although some civil servants require ministerial authorisation it is not customary to refuse attendance.
- 13 Hearings can be held in public, unless the person heard demands a private hearing. Normally hearings are not held in public.
- 14 Ministers.

their parent chambers, their reports get precedence over the original bill. Redrafting laws is principally a committee function since plenary assemblies are ill-equipped, due to their size, to elaborate on detail. If committees cannot rewrite government bills, the legislature as a whole is in a comparatively weaker position *vis-à-vis* the executive.

Herbert Döring's findings concerning committee authority are reported here in Table 4.⁷⁶ As revealed in this table, not all parliaments have the discretionary powers to rewrite a proposed law – some can only recommend amendments to the bill in question. In the British case, the committees undertake the task of discussing the text, article by article, line by line, with the opposition continually attempting to substitute its own proposals for those of the government. Sometimes the parliamentary majority also wants to amend the bill, but, generally, the government controls a secure majority which has little or no interest in changing the Government Bill under consideration.

In several countries, the government may interfere with the committees' legislative preparation. British committees consider amendments but cannot adopt them if the minister in charge of the bill does not accept them. A similar rule is applied in Greece. As a result, committee scrutiny is restricted to details. Hence, the British government on average secures passage of 96 per cent of its bills. While amendments are often proposed on government bills, the government almost invariably determines whether or not the proposed amendments will succeed.⁷⁷

The French government also strictly controls the committees' amendment procedures in order to avoid any disturbing changes of its bills. The government can reject all amendments as a result of which funds would be depleted or public expenditure increased. This rule enables the government to reject virtually all amendments that it does not like.⁷⁸

Control of the Committees' Timetable

A third aspect of agenda setting powers regards the control of the committees' timetables. The less external actors can control the committees' timetables, the greater the committee autonomy. Committees which control their own timetables can decide when to report to the plenary assembly. To what extent do the committees control their own timetables and what power do the plenary assemblies have to recall bills submitted to a committee? Herbert Döring developed this theme at length, and the data he collected are reported in Table 4.⁷⁹ Most parliaments exhibit country-specific particularities which may make comparisons difficult. Yet, the various parliaments are classified according to an ordinal scale, varying from 'the directing authority of the plenary body with right to recall' at one

end of the scale, to 'the committees themselves set their agenda and the plenary assembly cannot recall business' on the other.

Information Acquisition: Hearings and Documents

The remaining powers to be investigated here are informational and concern the committees' powers to gather information when they prepare bills. Consider the committees' right to summon witnesses and documents. Parliaments can play distinctive and deliberative roles only if they have the capability to obtain information and expertise independent of the government. The informational perspective on legislative organisation emphasises the difficulty of knowing the precise effects of legislation *ex ante*. It also stresses asymmetric information among legislators. Members of committees sometimes gain tactical advantages over outsider colleagues because they are better informed. This is possible because of division of labour and specialisation within parliamentary parties, but this is not the only reason. Through membership in a committee, an MP often has easy access to relevant information through formal committee hearings, relationships with interest groups and executive agents in issue networks, and also from the party resources to which expert status helps him gain access.⁸⁰ Moreover, committee memberships or chairmanships often entitle legislators to certain resources, such as expert staff assistance, which puts them at an advantage compared to colleagues outside the committee.

Most committees in modern legislatures (including all parliaments under study here) have professional staff support, although the generosity of such support varies greatly. The standing committees of the United States Congress stand at one extreme (even after the recent Republican reforms), with a vast body of professional staff. In smaller European countries, even permanent legislative committees may have only a single secretary or other staff member, or several committees may even share a single staffer. In some countries with limited institutional resources, parliamentary committees may borrow staff from the cabinet office or from cognate departments in the executive branch. Naturally, such practices are unlikely to enhance the legislature's ability to serve as an independent watchdog *vis-à-vis* the same agencies.

The methods of obtaining information varies. The Danish committees apply a rare formula of gathering information from the government: committee questions. Committees submit questions to ministers while scrutinising bills or drafting resolutions. The minister is requested to send a written answer or to attend a committee meeting to supply oral answers. Although these questions formally are put by the committee, in reality any committee member can usually forward a question through the committee.⁸¹ Even if these procedures are unique to the Folketing, permanent committees

in other parliaments also establish channels to the corresponding ministry, albeit in other, more or less formalised ways. A reluctant minister usually risks running into trouble in parliament should he or she not inform the committee properly. Yet, exchanges of information between members of government and parliament often take place in an informal and co-operative fashion.

However, let us focus on the formal committee rights to compel witnesses to testify and to call for documents while preparing legislation.⁸² These are important rights that can be used as an ultimate weapon if the government does not hand over important information voluntarily.⁸³ Hearings are meetings in which committees receive testimony from witnesses. Government officials, delegations from interest groups, independent experts, or others can be summoned by the committee. Their prime function is to inform the committee members about policy considerations, but hearings can also serve as a means of building legislative majorities and attracting public opinion. The latter functions are, of course, facilitated if hearings are held in public.

Table 4 shows in which parliaments committees can compel persons to testify, a right that varies with regard to whom the committees can compel. The committees with the strongest such powers include those in Austria, where any citizen can be compelled to testify. In Denmark and Spain, the right to summon witnesses is restricted to ministers only. In 11 parliaments, committees may invite witnesses as they prepare legislation, but they cannot compel them to appear. However, even if appearing before a committee for testimony is not compulsory, invited witnesses rarely refuse to attend a hearing in any of these countries. Only Ireland and the United Kingdom do not allow even parliamentary law-making committees to invite witnesses.

Table 4 also reveals whether testimony is given in public or private meetings. Several parliaments have only recently established public hearings (for example, Belgium in 1985, Finland in 1991, France in 1991 and Sweden in 1989), indicating an increased interest in hearings. Moreover, the number of public hearings has risen in those parliaments where they are allowed. In Germany, for instance, hearings were exceptional until the 1970s, but since then their number has increased. The same goes for Italy, where a 1971 reform of Assembly regulations opened up the possibility (now realised) of more hearings in the American style.⁸⁴

An alternative method of gathering information is by soliciting documents from public and/or private institutions and citizens. While many parliaments have the right to solicit such materials, some lack a legal right to demand the documents and/or the means to enforce their authority. In some countries, the set of persons or institutions obliged to disclose documents is limited. Table 4 shows which committees can demand

documents and, in some cases, whom they can compel to submit them. In about half of the set of countries (nine), the parliamentary committees cannot effectively demand documents at all whereas, in the other half, the committees can compel at least the government to supply this kind of information.

CONCLUSION

Committees are, by broad consensus, among the most significant internal organisational features of modern parliaments. Committee members are among the most important legislative privileged groups, and contemporary neo-institutional theories of legislative behaviour have paid much attention to the rationale and functions of legislative committees. This article has examined committees in modern European parliaments. The complexity and diversity of such arrangements are immediately apparent. It is obvious that the analytical literature has only scratched the surface of such institutions and that many of the critical questions concerning parliamentary committees have not yet even been asked, much less answered.

This article, has surveyed west European parliamentary committees by focusing on their structures, procedures and powers. The main interest has been in the third of these themes, and the discussion of structures and procedures has been slanted towards their implications for committee powers. The discussion has been couched in terms of three 'families' of theories of legislative organisation developed in the study of American political institutions. Though the debate between proponents of these various theories has been vigorous, the theories share a foundation in methodological individualism, rational choice analysis and a conviction that institutions matter. They have transformed scholarship on United States congressional institutions. Ultimately, students of legislative committees in parliamentary systems will also want to examine their institutions more rigorously in light of the understanding that these theories can provide.

One reason that we should seriously consider the theoretical guidelines provided by this neo-institutional literature on legislative organisation is that this scholarship may allow us to move beyond the kind of inductive comparisons that the data presented in this article might otherwise induce. The neo-institutional literature has two aims: to account for the effects of legislative organisation (institutional equilibrium) and to explain its origins (equilibrium institutions). In other words, the different perspectives in the neo-institutional literature on legislative organisation lead us partly to expect different behaviours within similar institutions, and partly to expect different forms of legislative structure to be correlated. Since the data presented here are purely institutional rather than behavioural, the

behavioural implications of these perspectives (institutional equilibrium) cannot be tested in any meaningful sense. One can, however, seek to identify some of these models' implications concerning committee organisation itself (equilibrium institutions).

If the *distributive* perspective is correct, then the strengthening of legislative committees should be correlated with enforced legislative property rights. Committees that serve the functions this perspective identifies should have well-established rights and powers within well-defined jurisdictions. The distributive perspective attributes to legislators universalistic norms of reciprocity and mutual deference which sustain the powers of committees. Specialised committees should therefore operate in a setting in which they are routinely granted deference, and in which various universalistic behaviours occur. One would also expect strong committees to coexist with relatively weak political parties unable to crack committee dominance.

The *informational* perspective, on the other hand, suggests that committee powers should be a matter of delegation rather than property rights. Accordingly, we should expect to see clear evidence of committee dedication to expertise and information collection. This perspective would predispose us to look for evidence of efforts to strengthen information collection and privacy in committees. Those committees that conform to these expectations should also be those capable of wielding power *vis-à-vis* the floor. And the less biased these committees, the more influential they should be within the parent body.

Finally, the *partisan* perspective suggests a very different relationship between committee and party influence. In this view, strong committees are not antithetical to, or substitutes for, strong parties. On the contrary, committees are the handmaidens of political parties and their leaders, and the strength of committees should co-vary positively with that of political parties. Strong parties should delegate authority to strong committees, particularly in key policy areas requiring extensive coordination of members' interests.

These propositions are an important agenda for future research. Although the present data permit no rigorous test, Mattson and Strøm have conducted a preliminary examination.⁸⁵ An important next step would be to relate the institutional characteristics that have been mapped to the behavioural patterns of legislators in order to understand the importance of different rules and procedures. Another prominent agenda is defined by the implications of different committee institutions for majority and minority rights in legislatures. And, ultimately, partial insights such as this analysis offers can help us understand the conditions under which parliaments can be most effective. For the prospects of parliamentary democracy, that is a critical condition.

NOTES

1. Results of this research have previously been published in I. Mattson and K. Ström, 'Parliamentary Committees', in H. Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), pp.249–307.
2. W. Wilson, *Congressional Government* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1885).
3. P. Laundy, *Parliaments in the Modern World* (Aldershot: Gower, 1989), p.96.
4. Döring, *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*.
5. G.B. Galloway, *Congress at the Crossroads* (New York: Crowell, 1946).
6. K. Krehbiel, *Information and Legislative Organization* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), p.2.
7. K. Ström, 'Parliamentary Government and Legislative Organization', in Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, pp.51–82.
8. M.L. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1979).
9. For example, R.D. McKelvey, 'Intransitivities in Multidimensional Voting Models and Some Implications for Agenda Control', *Journal of Economic Theory*, Vol.16 (1976), pp.472–82.
10. See K.A. Shepsle and B.R. Weingast, 'Positive Theories of Congressional Institutions', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol.19, No.2 (1994), pp.148–79; and Krehbiel, *Information and Legislative Organization*.
11. See D.R. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974).
12. See D.P. Baron, 'Majoritarian Incentives, Pork Barrel Programs, and Procedural Control', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.35, No.1 (1991), pp.57–90.
13. See K.A. Shepsle, *The Giant Jigsaw Puzzle: Democratic Committee Assignments in the Modern House* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978); and Shepsle and Weingast, 'Positive Theories of Congressional Institutions'.
14. T. Gilligan and K. Krehbiel, 'Asymmetric Information and Legislative Rules with a Heterogeneous Committee', *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol.33, No.2 (1989), pp.459–90; and Krehbiel, *Information and Legislative Organization*.
15. See G.W. Cox and M.D. McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan: Party Government in the House* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).
16. M. Shaw, 'Conclusions', in J.D. Lees and M. Shaw (eds.), *Committees in Legislatures: A Comparative Analysis* (Oxford: Martin Robertson, 1979), p.394.
17. For example, Shaw, 'Conclusions'.
18. Döring, *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*.
19. Shaw, 'Conclusions'.
20. Committees may formally endure for more than a legislative term in non-elected assemblies or in chambers in which the membership is replaced on a rotating basis (for example, the United States Senate).
21. H. Schellknecht, 'The System of Parliamentary Committees', *Constitutional and Parliamentary Information*, Vol.139–40 (1984), pp.86–158.
22. G. Smith, *Politics in Western Europe* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p.167.
23. Y. Mény, *Government and Politics in Western Europe, Britain, France, Italy, Germany*, Second Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.205.
24. See A. Adonis, *Parliament Today*, Second Edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), ch. 7; and R. Rose, *Politics in England*, Fourth Edition (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1986), pp.96–7.
25. Swiss specialised committees were established only after 1990. The entries for Switzerland, however, show the situation as of 1994.
26. D. Arter, *The Nordic Parliaments. A Comparative Analysis* (London: C. Hurst, 1984), p.172.
27. R.B. Andeweg and G.A. Irwin, *Dutch Government and Politics* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), p.141.
28. Arter, *The Nordic Parliaments*, p.171.
29. Mény, *Government and Politics in Western Europe, Britain, France, Italy, Germany*, p.204.
30. W. Steffani, 'Parties (Parliamentary Groups) and Committees in the Bundestag', in U. Thaysen, R.H. Davidson and R.G. Livingston (eds.), *The U.S. Congress and the German*

- Bundestag* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), p.277.
31. Joint committees in the United Kingdom are select committees composed of members of both houses meeting as one committee. There is one permanent joint committee, concerned with the scrutiny of Statutory Instruments, but during each session others are set up on an *ad hoc* basis. See Adonis, *Parliament Today*, p.151.
 32. Note that this discussion applies to legislative committees only and not to committees with other functions.
 33. S.S. Smith and C.J. Deering, *Committees in Congress*, Second Edition (Washington, DC: CQ Press, 1990), pp.62–68.
 34. See M.L. Mezzy and D.M. Olson (eds.), *Legislatures in the Policy Process: The Dilemmas of Economic Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and K. Strom, *Minority Government and Majority Rule* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p.71.
 35. See Inter-Parliamentary Union, *Parliaments of the World*, Table 20.5.
 36. Schellknecht, 'The System of Parliamentary Committees', p.109.
 37. Smith and Deering, *Committees in Congress*, p.161.
 38. See Shepsle and Weingast, 'Positive Theories of Congressional Institutions'.
 39. See Döring, *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*.
 40. Smith and Deering, *Committees in Congress*, p.161.
 41. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*, p.97.
 42. In the British House of Lords, the European Communities Committee and the Science and Technology Committee have appointed subcommittees. However, although these committees are permanent, they do not consider legislative bills.
 43. D.M. Olson, *Democratic Legislative Institutions: A Comparative View* (Armonk, NY: ME. Sharpe, 1994), p.59.
 44. W. Safran, *The French Polity* (New York: Longman, 1991), p.170.
 45. *Chronik des Deutschen Bundestages*, 11. Wahlperiode, 1991, pp.353–58.
 46. N. Elder, A.H. Thomas and D. Arter, *The Consensual Democracies? The Government and Politics of the Scandinavian States*, Second Edition (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp.135–6.
 47. K.A. Shepsle and B.R. Weingast, 'Legislative Politics and Budget Outcomes', in G.B. Mills and J.L. Palmer (eds.), *Federal Budget* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 1984); and C.M. Tidmarch, 'Politics, Power, and Leadership in Congressional Subcommittees', in R.L. Peabody and N.W. Polsby (eds.), *New Perspectives on the House of Representatives*, Fourth Edition (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp.108–39.
 48. K.A. Shepsle and B.R. Weingast, 'The Institutional Foundations of Committee Power', *American Political Science Review*, Vol.81, No.1 (1987), pp.85–104.
 49. Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*, part 5.
 50. J. Manley, *The Politics of Finance: The House Committee on Ways and Means* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1970), p.24; and Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*, ch. 7.
 51. Sources: IPU Table 20.4 and questionnaire. There are also a few cases in which small, minority parties have been overrepresented in committees, such as Sweden in 1994–98. In order to gain parliamentary cooperation, the Swedish Social Democratic government formed in the autumn of 1994 refrained from claiming 15 committee seats in favour of parties which were not large enough to gain seats in every committee (*Från Riksdag och Departement*, No.30, 1994).
 52. Schellknecht, 'The System of Parliamentary Committees', p.106.
 53. The procedure of the Committee of the Whole House is used when the matter under consideration is too extensive for a single committee to scrutinise on its own and, above all, when the government controls only a small majority that would be further reduced in committee. When the Committee of the Whole House meets, the House no longer observes the rules that apply to plenary sessions. See Mény, *Government and Politics in Western Europe, Britain, France, Italy, Germany*, p.205.
 54. Schellknecht, 'The System of Parliamentary Committees', p.114.
 55. Adonis, *Parliament Today*, p.153.
 56. Andeweg and Irwin, *Dutch Government and Politics*, p.141.
 57. Schellknecht, 'The System of Parliamentary Committees', p.114.

58. Safran, *The French Polity*, p.170.
59. Schellknecht, 'The System of Parliamentary Committees', p.116.
60. Mayhew, *Congress: The Electoral Connection*.
61. Mény, *Government and Politics in Western Europe, Britain, France, Italy, Germany*, p.205.
62. This privilege is extended to MPs whose bills are deliberated on in the committee and also to MPs from the Faeroe Islands and Greenland whenever matters are discussed which particularly affect their constituencies.
63. See Döring, *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, especially I. Mattson 'Private Members' Initiatives and Amendments', pp.448–87.
64. B.E. Rasch, 'Parliamentary Voting Procedures', in Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, pp.488–527; and T. Saalfeld, 'On Dogs and Whips: Recorded Votes', in Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, pp.528–65.
65. Olson, *Democratic Legislative Institutions: A Comparative View*, p.58.
66. For a dissenting view, see Cox and McCubbins, *Legislative Leviathan*, p.4, et passim.
67. Mezey, *Comparative Legislatures*, p.64.
68. Shaw, 'Conclusions', p.384.
69. K. Krehbiel, 'Spatial Models of Legislative Choice', *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol.13, No.3 (1988), pp.259–319.
70. See also Smith and Deering, *Committees in Congress*, p.9.
71. R.F. Fenno, Jr., *Congressmen in Committees* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1973), p.xiii.
72. In addition, the Finnish Finance Committee and Bank Committee also have this right.
73. M. Cotta, 'The Rise and Fall of the 'Centrality' of the Italian Parliament: Transformations of the Executive–Legislative Subsystem After the Second World War'. in G.W. Copeland and S.C. Patterson (eds.), *Parliaments in the Modern World: Changing Institutions* (Ann Arbor, MN: University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp.59–94; and Mény, *Government and Politics in Western Europe, Britain, France, Italy, Germany*, p.199.
74. I. Mattson, *Förhandlingsparlamentarismen: En Jämförande Studie av Riksdagen och Folketinget* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996).
75. See Riksdagsutredningen, *Reformera riksdagsarbetet. Betänkande. Juni 1993* (Stockholm: Riksdagen, 1993).
76. Döring, *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*.
77. Rose, *Politics in England*, p.90.
78. I. Mattson, 'Private Members' Initiatives and Amendments', in Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, pp.448–87.
79. Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*.
80. E. Damgaard, 'How Parties Control Committee Members', in Döring (ed.), *Parliaments and Majority Rule in Western Europe*, pp.308–25.
81. E. Damgaard, 'Parliamentary Questions and Control in Denmark', in M. Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries: Forms of Questioning and Behavioural Trends* (Helsinki: Finnish Political Science Association, 1994), pp.44–76; and H. Jensen, 'Committees as Actors or Arenas: Putting Questions to the Danish Standing Committees', in Wiberg (ed.), *Parliamentary Control in the Nordic Countries*, pp.77–102.
82. Please note that the scope of this discussion is confined to the rights of committees to obtain information for the purpose of preparing legislation.
83. A note of caution is in order here. Since the transparency of bureaucratic decisions varies between countries, so does the need for the power to procure documents. The powers to compel witnesses and documents are least important in countries where most documents are open to all citizens from the start. Nevertheless, these powers are invariably consequential since no country makes all documents open to the public.
84. Mény, *Government and Politics in Western Europe, Britain, France, Italy, Germany*, p.207.
85. Mattson and Strøm, 'Parliamentary Committees'.